

*KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY
OF RELIGION*

Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion

By Reidar Thomte

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*TO THE MEMORY
OF MY PARENTS*

*JULIUS G. THØMTE
AND
ANNA M. THØMTE*

PREFACE

IN 1936 Princeton University Press and the American-Scandinavian Foundation published Professor David F. Swenson's translation of Søren Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments*. This was the first complete translation into English of one of Kierkegaard's works. Today, twelve years later, all of Kierkegaard's works, with one major exception, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*, are available in English translations. It is very unusual that so many works by a foreign thinker should be translated within so brief a time, and it bespeaks the great influence which this writer of a century ago has upon modern religious and philosophical thinking.

There is at the present a need for interpretative literature or introductions to the study of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was essentially a religious author. His existentialism is religious through and through and has very little semblance, if any, to the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. It is the purpose of this book to furnish an introduction to the religious thought of Kierkegaard, and to stimulate interest in the study of his works.

In his early youth Kierkegaard penned the statement, "Philosophy and Christianity can never be reconciled."* He used the term philosophy with special reference to Hegel's system, and of life-views that are purely *human* and attainable by human reason. When I have chosen as a title, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion*, I am mindful of the above words of Kierkegaard, but I am using the term philosophy in the sense of a *Lebensanschauung* on a religious level.

Two men whom I have never met have greatly influenced my study of Kierkegaard, the late Professor Eduard Geismar of Copenhagen and the late Professor David F. Swenson of Minnesota University. Mrs. David F. Swenson has rendered valuable assistance and encouragement in the preparation of the manuscript.

* Søren Kierkegaard, *Papirer*, I A 94.

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*KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY
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CHAPTER I

KIERKEGAARD'S DIAGNOSIS OF HIS TIME

FAILURE TO EXIST—CONTEMPT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL—
SPECULATIVE CHRISTIANITY



It is as if Christianity also had been promulgated as a little system, if not quite as good as the Hegelian, . . . it is as if Christ were a professor, and as if the apostles had founded a little scientific society.¹



THE first part of the nineteenth century was a distressing period for Denmark. In 1807 the British fleet bombarded Copenhagen and captured the Dano-Norwegian fleet. In 1813, the year of Kierkegaard's birth, the country went bankrupt, and the following year the union of Denmark and Norway was dissolved. But this period of political disintegration became a period of rebirth which brought forth such men as Bertel Thorwaldsen (1770-1844), the celebrated sculptor; and in the field of literature the greatest of Danish romantic poets, Adam Gottlob Oehlenschläger (1779-1850); and the author of fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875). Side by side with the revival in art and literature the country experienced a revival in religious life. Three religious leaders tower above the rest: Nicolai Frederic Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872), Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884), and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). The latter has been regarded as Scandinavia's foremost thinker and prose writer.

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the "Philosophical Fragments,"* translated by David F. Swenson; completed and edited by Walter Lowrie. Princeton University Press and American-Scandinavian Foundation. 1941. On p. 193.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the greatest contributions to Danish thinking came from Germany. There was also some influence from France and particularly from England. However, Danish philosophy always maintained a certain independence, particularly in its leanings toward individualism. By philosophical individualism we mean that view of life which maintains that the individual is of supreme value. The decisive ideal for an individual is that which is subjectively true, the insights and convictions of the individual spirit. When confronted with actions which involve choices with reference to good and evil the personality receives its real significance.

In the day of Søren Kierkegaard, Hegelianism was the ruling philosophy in Germany as well as in Denmark. To G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) the Absolute is Spirit (*Geist*), but the Absolute is not regarded as being beyond contradictory relationships. The contradictions are comprehended within the Absolute. Due to the contradictions which the Absolute possesses, it organizes itself in a constant evolution or progression. The Absolute of Hegel is therefore no static identity but a "dialectic process" or a "logical" progression which builds upon the contradictory relationships which are part of its nature. Through the dialectic process the immanent idea unfolds itself and becomes more and more apparent.

Hegel views nature as a system of stages of which one necessarily rises out of the other, but not in such a way that one stage is caused by the other. He regards it as a faulty conception of other philosophies to look upon evolution as a process brought about by external forces or circumstances. It is the self-activity of the immanent idea which is the foundation of nature. Hence metamorphosis can only happen to the idea itself. All development therefore is a change in thought.²

In nature the spirit is slumbering, but in the unfolding

² G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, with preface by H. Glockner (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1927), § 249.

of human history Hegel finds the more perfect expression of the spirit. "Es ist der Gang Gottes in der Welt, dass der Staat da ist."³ The state is the expression of the progression of God in the world. Each state, each civilization with its particular arts, religions, and sciences, each government embodies a phase of the universal idea or world-spirit. Thus the history of the world becomes the actual realization of an infinite, eternal, and objective mind. The state is the full reality of the moral idea. Hegel maintains that since the state is the true spiritual totality, the individual derives his true value through participation in the life of the state. The individual finds himself and realizes himself through participation in the institutions of society.

When we turn to religion, Hegel describes orthodoxy as clinging to the literal expressions of dogmas, unaware of the fact that the age of "immediate" religion had yielded to an age of culture and reflection. Rationalism, on the other hand, presented a concept of God which was empty and finite. The task of philosophy is to find a way out of this dilemma. While religiously the eternal truth is conceived in the forms of imagination as historical events or in external pictorial forms, philosophy translates the content of religion into the form of thought. Thus the distinction between philosophy and religion is one of form only.

Hegel's philosophy does not at all exclude a theistic position, but if one accepts his monistic evolution, one will be forced to a pantheistic view of life. Hegel leaves the door wide open for a monistic-pantheistic religion.

A contemporary of Hegel, the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), emphasizes the element of feeling in religion. Religion, he maintains, consists in the "immediate consciousness that everything finite exists in and through the infinite, everything temporal, in and through the eternal."⁴ When reflection awakens it seeks an

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, with preface by E. Gaus (Stuttgart: F. Frommann, 1928), § 258.

⁴ H. Höffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, a sketch of the history of philosophy from the close of the renaissance to our own day, translated

expression of that upon which our whole life and being depends, and this feeling of absolute dependency becomes to Schleiermacher the expression for the consciousness of God. In other words, God denotes the "whence?" of the peculiar feeling of dependence. Concepts and axioms of religion have their origin in the reflections on states of immediate feelings. They are not part of the essential nature of religion. The problem of the *Glaubenslehre* (Dogmatics) is to translate the figurative expressions of feelings into true expressions. Schleiermacher rejects all symbols which cannot be traced back to immediate experiences of feeling. Hegel and Schleiermacher had this belief in common—that all the opposites of life could be brought into harmony and mediated in a higher unity.

The first to introduce Hegelianism into Denmark was the playwright and professor at Copenhagen, Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860). He had studied under Hegel and had entered into a personal friendship with the great master. Yet it was not Heiberg as much as H. L. Martensen who made Hegelianism the ruling philosophy in Denmark. In his works and papers Kierkegaard frequently mentions the names of these two men.

As a student Martensen had been profoundly influenced by Hegel. He saw the possibilities which Hegel's philosophy offered for a speculative theology which could mediate between rationalism and orthodoxy. The great ideal of his youth is expressed in the following words: "There must be a view of the world and of life in which everything that has meaning in existence (*Dasein*)—nature and spirit, nature and history, poetry and art and philosophy, harmoniously unite to form a temple of the spirit in which Christianity is the all-governing and all-explaining center."⁵ In order to arrive at such a world-view Martensen made use of the Hegelian dialectic.

from the German edition by B. E. Meyer (two volumes, London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1920), II, p. 209.

⁵ H. L. Martensen, *Af mit Levnet*, I (published in 3 volumes, Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag, 1883), p. 23. Translation mine.

In his *Dogmatics* Martensen removes all the difficulties which confront reason. Only in the last part of the book does he seem to recognize a stumbling block for reason, namely in the dogma of eternal damnation. His *Christian Ethics* is an attempt to accomplish the ideal of his youth, a synthesis of humanism and Christianity.⁶ But the synthesis which he presents amounts to an unconditional surrender of humanism to Christianity. Such a synthesis is not a higher unity in the Hegelian sense, but a submission of one to the other. Whether such a synthesis was commensurable with Christianity was a problem which Martensen never seriously raised.⁷

While Kierkegaard had a great admiration for Hegel,⁸ he never tired of heaping invectives upon Martensen who, obsessed by the fixed idea of the age, always claimed to go "beyond Hegel."⁹ To Kierkegaard going "beyond Hegel" was something like playing leapfrog over another,¹⁰ or like living in the country where one's letters had to be addressed *via* a big town. In this case the address was John Doe *via* Hegel.¹¹

It is quite natural that Søren Kierkegaard should be influenced by the philosophy of his day. His early works, particularly *Concerning [Hans Christian] Andersen as a Romanticist*, and the dissertation, *The Concept of Irony*, as

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷ H. Høffding, *Danske Filosofer* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag, 1909), p. 145.

⁸ *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, VI B 54:12.

Søren Kierkegaards Papirer, edited by P. A. Heiberg, V. Kuhr, and E. Torsting, vol. I-VI; VII, parts 1-2; VIII, parts 1-2; IX, X, parts 1-6; XI, parts 1-2. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag. 1909-. Edition to be completed.

Kierkegaard's papers are grouped under the headings A, B, and C. The Journals and notations are found under A; notations referring to his literary work under B; notes from his readings and excerpts, some of them very extensive, are under C. Several of the volumes are issued in several parts, each part being a book of five hundred or more pages. In the footnotes *Papirer VI B 54:12* means: *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, vol. VI, group B in that volume, entry number 54, and section 12 of the entry. *Papirer X 5 A 144* refers to vol. X, part 5, group A, entry number 144.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I A 328.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Papirer*, II A 697.

well as his philosophical terminology reveal a pronounced Hegelian influence. However, he was never a servant of Hegel.

One of the chief aspects of Hegel's philosophy was the theory of the higher unity into which contradictory positions could be mediated. By this process of mediation the real edge was removed from all contradictions. Kierkegaard's greatest ridicule is directed against this aspect of Hegel's philosophy. Already in 1839 he wrote: "We certainly do not need Hegel to inform us that relative contradictions can be mediated, the ancients have already said that, . . . but personality will protest in all eternity the proposition that absolute contradictions can be mediated (and this protest is incommensurable with the assertion of the mediation), it will in all eternity repeat its immortal dilemma: to be or not to be that is the question (*Hamlet*)."¹² Mediation removes the absolute contradictions between good and evil.

Kierkegaard's indictment against his age is chiefly directed against the prevailing Hegelianism. One of the great fallacies, as he saw it, was the exaggerated emphasis upon philosophic contemplation of world-history. Such a contemplation was no longer limited to individual scholars or thinkers, it had become the characteristic of the age. As a result, the individual had been reduced to an observer, and intellectual contemplation had become "the *ethical* answer to the question of what I *ethically* have to do."¹³

The ethical view which regards life as striving or endeavor was considered by Kierkegaard to be in mortal combat with the metaphysical view which contemplates the epochs of world-history. Every living person who is not altogether *distract* must choose but, if he chooses the metaphysical, he commits spiritual suicide.¹⁴ In the words of Kierkegaard: "One thing has always escaped Hegel—what

¹² *Ibid.*, II A 454. Translation mine. Cf. *The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard: A Selection*, edited and translated by Alexander Dru (Oxford University Press, 1938), No. 286.

¹³ *Postscript*, p. 119.

¹⁴ *Papirer*, VII 1 A 153.

it means to live. He knows only how to *represent life*, and if he be a master in this art, it is also certain that he is the most striking contrast to a maieutic thinker."¹⁵

Instead of recognizing that ethical existence was reality, men had confused ethics with contemplation. The "abnormal historical consciousness" prevented ethical existence.¹⁶ Hence Kierkegaard's thesis: "Hegelian philosophy, by failing to define its relation to the existing individual and by ignoring the ethical, confounds existence."¹⁷ Men smiled at the unreality of the life of the cloister, but the unreality of so-called "pure thought" wholly escaped their attention. Yet the life of the monk was preferable to the unreality of the pure thinker, for while the monk withdrew from the whole world, he did not abstract from himself; and while in passionate forgetfulness the hermit shut out the world, the speculative thinker forgot himself in world-historic distraction.¹⁸

Not only had the age lost itself in world-historic contemplation; it had forsaken the individual and taken refuge in the collective idea. In a striking passage Kierkegaard presents what might well have been a description of modern totalitarianism with its contempt for the individual and emphasis upon the state.

"The more the collective idea comes to dominate even the ordinary consciousness, the more forbidding seems the transition to becoming a particular existing human being instead of losing oneself in the race, and saying 'we,' 'our age,' 'the nineteenth century.' That it is a little thing merely to be a particular existing human being is not to be denied. . . . For what does a mere individual count for? Our age knows only too well how little it is [to be an individual human being], but here lies also the immorality of the age. Each age has its own characteristic depravity. Ours is perhaps not pleasure and indulgence or sensuality, but rather a dissolute pantheistic contempt for the individual man. In the midst of all our exultation over the achieve-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Postscript*, p. 283.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

ments of the age and the nineteenth century, there sounds a note of poorly concealed contempt for the individual man; in the midst of the self-importance of the contemporary generation there is revealed a sense of despair over being human. Everything must attach itself so as to be a part of some movement; men are determined to lose themselves in the totality of things, in world-history, fascinated and deceived by a magic witchery; no one wants to be an individual human being. Hence perhaps the many attempts to continue clinging to Hegel, even by men who have reached an insight into the questionable character of his philosophy. It is a fear that if they were to become particular existing human beings, they would vanish tracelessly, so that not even the daily press would be able to discover them, still less critical journals, to say nothing at all of speculative philosophers immersed in world-history. As particular human beings they fear that they will be doomed to a more isolated and forgotten existence than that of a man in the country; for if a man lets go of Hegel he will not even be in a position to have a letter addressed to him.”¹⁹

To Kierkegaard the radical malady of the age was the divorce of life and thinking. In ancient Greece philosophy had always maintained a relation to ethics, and a thinker was “an existing individual stimulated by his reflection to a passionate enthusiasm.”²⁰ This was also the case in early Christendom where a believer “strove enthusiastically to understand himself in the existence of faith.”²¹ Kierkegaard maintained that philosophy had become something queer, highly artificial, and capable of being learned by rote.²² Due to the objective tendency of the age and the vast increase of knowledge men had forgotten what it is to exist and what “inwardness” signifies.²³

The following words found in a draft to the *Postscript* were no doubt directed against Hegel: “One may be great as a logician and become immortal through one’s accomplishment, and yet prostitute oneself by supposing that the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-318.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 273; cf. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 216, 235, 257.

logical is the existential, and that the principle of contradiction is removed in the realm of existence since it undeniably is removed in the realm of logic. Existence is exactly that separation which frustrates the mere logical stream.”²⁴ Kierkegaard caricatured the philosophers of his day as men who built enormous castles, but themselves were content to live in shacks near by.²⁵

In a letter²⁶ written at the age of twenty-two, when he was a theological student, Kierkegaard states that because of the great contrasts within Christendom itself, it was exceedingly difficult to make an unbiased survey of the theological situation. Orthodoxy, in which he had grown up, he regarded as a tottering colossus. Rationalism, on the other hand, was like a Noah’s ark into which clean and unclean animals crowded side by side. Rationalism based itself upon the Scriptures when these were in agreement with it, but not otherwise. While rationalism received its essential coloring from Christianity, it established itself by other means. But it was not rationalism but the speculative philosophy, associated with Hegel in Germany and Martensen in Denmark, which Kierkegaard regarded as the greatest enemy of Christianity.

The influence of Hegelianism on Christianity had brought about a spiritual bankruptcy or a confusion of tongues “in which every Christian concept has been evaporated and so completely dissolved into a mass of fog that it is impossible to recognize it.”²⁷ The philosophers had given new and entirely different meanings to such Christian concepts as “faith,” “incarnation,” “tradition,” and “inspiration.” Thus “faith” had become the immediate consciousness; “tradition” was regarded as a certain world experience; “inspiration” was nothing more than the result of God’s breathing the spirit of life into man; and “incarnation” was reduced to the presence of one or another idea in one or more individuals.²⁸

Such was Kierkegaard’s view at the age of twenty-four.

²⁴ *Papirer*, VI B 98:45. Translation mine. ²⁵ *The Journals*, No. 583.
²⁶ *Papirer*, I A 72. ²⁷ *Papirer*, I A 328. ²⁸ *Ibid.*

Nine years later he wrote under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus in the *Postscript*: "No human being can ever have been in such distress as Christianity is of late. . . . The entire Christian terminology has been appropriated by speculative thought to its own purposes, under the assumption that speculative thought and Christianity are identical. . . . The concepts have gradually been emasculated and the words have been made to mean anything and everything."²⁹

He held that no philosophy had been so detrimental to Christianity as Hegelianism. Earlier philosophies were honest enough to let Christianity remain what it was. Hegel, on the other hand, was audacious enough to solve the problem of speculation and Christianity by altering Christianity.³⁰ In the early days the fearful thing for the one who approached Christianity was that he might be offended by the demands of Christianity. That time was past. Now one becomes a speculative philosopher who speculates about faith, not about whether or not he possesses it, but about objective faith or a sum of doctrinal propositions.³¹ The age was "doctrinizing" and understood everything in a "doctrinizing" manner.³² "It is as if Christianity also had been promulgated as a little system, if not quite as good as the Hegelian, . . . it is as if Christ were a professor, and as if the apostles had founded a little scientific society."³³ The age had systematically and rote-recitingly solved the problem of Christianity. All difficulties had been done away with.³⁴ The age had lost its passion; it did not even possess sufficient character to bring forth a heresy. A heresy presupposes sufficient honesty to let Christianity count for what it is, and sufficient passion to have a different opinion.³⁵ Christianity had become a "diluted, enervated sentimentality and a refined Epicureanism."³⁶

Kierkegaard traces three stages in the evolution of Christendom. Since the passage is exceedingly interesting in its

²⁹ *Postscript*, pp. 324 f. ³⁰ *Papirer*, XI 1 A 14. ³¹ *Postscript*, p. 193.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 246. ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 193. Cf. p. 252. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

³⁵ *Papirer*, XI 1 A 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

irony and also reveals the bitter attitude of Kierkegaard to the "Christianity" of his day it is given in full:

"But when they had done away with the notion of becoming a Christian by means of decisive action capable of bringing about the predicament (situation) in which it is decided whether one will be a Christian or not, then (for the sake at least of doing something) they put in its stead the notion of thinking about Christianity, supposing they would become Christians in this way, and intending to advance subsequently beyond faith; for they did not stop at faith—and this is not to be wondered at, for they did not start out like Luther from exaggeration with respect to works and then attain faith, but they began as a matter of course with faith, which 'naturally' every man has. If one would call medieval Christianity the monastic-ascetic type, one might call the Christianity of our age the professor-scientific type. Not all, it is true, could become professors, but nevertheless all acquired a certain professorial and scientific cast of mind. And just as in the first period not all could become martyrs, but all stood in relationship with the martyrs; and as in the Middle Ages all did not enter the monastery, but all stood in relationship with the monastery and regarded the man who entered the monastery as a genuine Christian—so in our time all stand in relationship with the professor, the professor is the genuine Christian. And with the professor came scientific learning, and with learning came doubters, and with learning and doubters came the scientifically learned public, and then came reasons *pro* and *contra*, and people were swayed *pro* and *contra*, 'for *pro* and *contra* in this case much can be said.'"⁸⁷

The figure of the "professor" symbolizes and personifies objective teaching and mere doctrine, and the tendency to translate everything into terms of objective knowledge. Over against this tendency stands the challenge of Kierke-

⁸⁷ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves!* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 203-204.

gaard: "Suppose Christianity were nothing of the kind; suppose on the contrary it were inwardness."³⁸

The prevailing spirit of the age was a poetic and contemplating *kultur*-pantheism. Kierkegaard maintained that all this evil was due to the great increase of objective knowledge and Hegel's speculative system. The philosophy of Hegel with its world-historic epochs had reduced Christianity to a triviality, which at any moment might be transcended by another epoch. Christianity had been reduced to an objective system of doctrine and rote-recitation without making the slightest impression upon life. Everybody was a Christian as a matter of course. Instead of acting with respect to Christianity men were thinking about it. Christianity had been transformed to a *Kultur* in which the principle of contradiction was removed. Since the Danish Church persisted in its support of the *status quo* we can understand the severity of Kierkegaard's ultimate challenge to the people of his day: "Whoever you are, whatever your life may be, my friend, by refusing hereafter (if you have participated hitherto), to take part in the public worship as it now is (with the claim of representing New Testament Christianity), thereby you assume the burden of one less guilty crime upon your conscience, for you take no part in making a mockery of God."³⁹

To sum up: Kierkegaard diagnosed the disease of his age as a divorce of life and thinking. Men had forgotten the significance of existing as human individuals; they had lost themselves in a speculative contemplation of world history. The attitude of the observer (a purely objective attitude) had replaced choice and decision in human striving.

The purpose of Kierkegaard's literary production is

³⁸ *Postscript*, p. 193.

³⁹ *Søren Kierkegaards Samlede Værker*, edited by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and O. Lange (14 volumes. Copenhagen: Glyndalske Boghandel Nordisk Forlag, 1901-1906), vol. XIII, p. 85. Quoted by David Swenson in *Something about Kierkegaard* (revised and enlarged edition, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1945), p. 24.

clearly stated in his own words: "My only analogy is Socrates. My task is a Socratic task—to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian. I do not call myself a Christian (keeping the ideal free), but I can reveal the fact that others are still less entitled to the name than I am."⁴⁰ His whole literary productivity had as its total idea the problem of becoming a Christian when the situation in which one is to become a Christian is in Christendom,⁴¹ in the midst of battalions of so-called Christian thinkers and legions of ministers and Christian docents who all are sophists; or, in other words, the problem is that of becoming a Christian when one lives in the illusion of being a Christian.⁴² His task, that of revising "the conception of what it means to be a Christian," he regarded as so unique that in eighteen hundred years of Christendom there was literally nothing analogous to it.⁴³ His analogy was Socrates, and like Socrates, he kept the ideal free. Hence he did not proclaim himself a Christian. Had men forgotten what it meant to exist religiously, they had no doubt also forgotten what it meant to exist as human beings. So Kierkegaard decided to go back as far as possible "in order not to reach the religious mode of existence too soon, to say nothing of the specifically Christian mode of existence."⁴⁴ But the method could not be dogmatizing or explanatory lest a new misunderstanding might arise, that of regarding existence as attaining knowledge about something.⁴⁵ His first task in order to begin from the beginning was "to exhibit [in existential characters] the existential relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical" mode of life.⁴⁶ This he did in *Either/Or*.

⁴⁰ *Samlede Værker*, XIV, p. 352. Translated by David F. Swenson, *op. cit.*, p. 37. Italics mine.

⁴¹ *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, translated by Walter Lowrie (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 42-43.

⁴² *Samlede Værker*, XIV, p. 352. Cf. Kierkegaard's *Attack upon "Christendom,"* translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 283.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁴⁴ *Postscript*, p. 223.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

CHAPTER II

THE AESTHETIC STAGE



*In vino veritas*¹



LIKE Plato, Kierkegaard was not only a philosopher but a great literary artist. He presented his ideas by means of dramatic presentations as well as abstract, formulations. Among the works which constitute the dramatic source material for the aesthetic stage are two of Kierkegaard's literary masterpieces, "The Seducer's Diary" (in *Either/Or*, I) and "*In Vino Veritas*" (the first part of *Stages*). The pattern for the first of these works is Schlegel's *Lucinde*, the pattern for the second is Plato's *Symposium*. According to Georg Brandes,² the literary critic, "The Seducer's Diary" is far superior to *Lucinde*, and "*In Vino Veritas*" holds its own in a comparison with its Platonic counterpart.

The abstract formulations of the aesthetic stage are found chiefly in the comments by Judge William, the ethicist in *Either/Or*, II; in the comments of Frater Taciturnus in the third part of *Stages*; and in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Besides the abstract formulations there are five outstanding literary incarnations of the aesthetic mode of life: Johannes the Seducer, whose diary is

¹ "In wine there is truth." When a person is under the influence of wine he shows himself in his true colors.

² Georg M. C. Brandes, *Kierkegaard und andere skandinavische Persönlichkeiten*, Carl Reissner (Dresden, 1924), p. 358: "Wenn man des Tagebuch des Verführers mit Schlegels *Lucinde* vergleicht, welcher das Motiv, wie schon erwähnt, entnommen ist, und wenn man bedenkt, wie berühmt diese schwache und in jeder Hinsicht unzulängliche Arbeit geworden ist, so fühlt man, welches Unrecht das Schicksal Kierkegaards dadurch zufügte, dass es ihn nicht in einem grösseren Lande geboren worden lies. Und wenn man '*In vino veritas*' mit Platons *Symposium* zusammenhält, als dessen Gegenstück es sich darstellt, so muss man mit Bewunderung empfinden, dass es den Vergleich so gut verträgt, wie eine moderne Komposition es überhaupt vermag. Das ist gewiss kein geringes Lob."

published in *Either/Or*, I; Victor Eremita, the publisher of A's and B's papers in *Either/Or*; Constantine Constantius, the author of *Repetition* and the arranger of the banquet in the *Stages*; the "young man," author of the first part of *Either/Or*; and the "Ladies' Tailor," in "*In Vino Veritas*," dressed according to the latest fashion and "perfumed and odorous of eau de Cologne."³

The procedure in treating Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage will be as follows: 1. A review and an interpretation of the dramatic presentation of the aesthetic stage. Since all five personalities appear in "*In Vino Veritas*," this will be the starting point. 2. A presentation of the abstract formulations of the aesthetic stage.

In this Chapter the author, instead of following the usual procedure of paraphrasing the sources, has made use of a great number of quotations. There are two reasons for so doing: 1. These quotations are essential to an appreciation of Kierkegaard. 2. It was Kierkegaard's intention that the reader should *hear* and *feel* the perdition connected with the aesthetic stage as soon as the aestheticist opened his mouth.

"*In Vino Veritas*" describes a banquet where each guest makes an oration about love. The matter of a banquet was first broached at a coffee house where the five friends occasionally met. But what should be the conditions of such a banquet? According to Johannes, the Seducer,⁴ such a banquet should be accomplished all of a sudden. The surroundings should all be new for the occasion, and everything subsequently destroyed. The conditions of Victor Eremita⁵ seemed impossible to meet. Such a banquet should not even be talked about in advance. To be good, a thing must be at once, *ex templo* ("on the spot" or "at once") for "at once" is the most divine of all categories.

"I require now the richest abundance of everything that

³ *Stages on Life's Way*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

can be thought of. Even though not everything is actually present the possibility of it which is more seductive than the sight, must be immediately at hand. . . . The meal itself must be calculated to awaken and incite that inexpressible desire which every worthy member of the party brings with him. . . . I require a more exuberant abundance of wine than Mephistopheles produced by boring holes in the table. I require an illumination more voluptuous than that of the gnomes when they heave up the mountain upon pillars and dance in a sea of flames. I require what most excites the senses, I require that delicious refreshment of perfumes which is more glorious than anything in the Arabian Nights. I require the ceaseless animation of a fountain. If Maecenas could not sleep without hearing the splash of the fountain, I cannot eat at a banquet without it. . . . I require chamber music, strong and subdued, and I require that at every instant it shall be an accompaniment to me."⁶

Were it not for Constantine the whole banquet would have ended in talk. One day the participants received from Constantine an invitation to a banquet that very same night. He had chosen as motto for the occasion: *In vino veritas.*⁷ No speech should be made, and no truth expressed except as *in vino*. The place of the banquet was a newly decorated hall in a wooded region outside Copenhagen. It was one of the last days of July. The folding doors were opened, and the guests stood for a moment overwhelmed by the brilliant illumination, the infatuating fragrance of perfume, and the strains from the ballet of Mozart's *Don Juan*.

When a few courses had been served, Constantine proposed that the banquet be concluded by every man making a speech, but no one was to speak before he had drunk so much that he could feel the power of the wine, and every speech should deal with love.⁸

The young man speaks first. He acknowledges that he has had no experiential knowledge of love. To him the thing

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

of chief importance is thought,⁹ and so he regards love objectively as a thinker. Said he:

"I have never looked upon any woman to desire her, I have not fluttered about undecidedly until I blindly plunged or swooned away into the most decisive relationship."¹⁰

"I have never, because it was smart, challenged a woman by a glance, but I have cast my eyes down, unwilling to abandon myself to an impression before I have clearly made out what is the significance of that power under the dominion of which I am about to let myself fall."¹¹

He realizes that love has its goal in marriage and the family, but to be a father and responsible for bringing other human beings into the world is a responsibility so great and fearful that he dares not assume it.¹² Love is an inexplicable power which reduces a man to the role of a marionette which moves when someone pulls the strings.¹³ His whole attitude may be epitomized in the following words: "I will not love anybody before I have fathomed the thought of love, and that I am not able to do, on the contrary, I have reached the conclusion that love is comic. So I am unwilling to love; but, alas, by this precaution the danger has not been avoided, for since I do not know what the lovable is, how it attacks me, or how it attacks a woman with reference to me, I cannot be sure of knowing whether I have avoided the danger. This is tragic, in a sense it is profoundly tragic . . . that there is something which exercises its power everywhere and yet cannot be grasped by thought."¹⁴

According to Constantine woman can only be rightfully construed under the category of jest. But jest he regards not as an aesthetic but as an imperfect ethical category. "The jest consists in applying the category, in subsuming her under it, because with her the serious can never become serious."¹⁵ It is the part of man to be absolute, to act

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 59.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

absolutely, to give expression to the absolute. If one regards woman as a fixed quantity, one makes a relative quantity of oneself.¹⁶ She does not lack in ideality. No youth has half as much ideality as a young girl, but the ideality is illusory. "To put her under a vacuum pump and pump all the air out of her would be cruel, and would not be in the least amusing, but to pump air into her, to pump her up to supernatural size, to let her suppose she has attained all the ideality a little miss of sixteen years can imagine she wants to have" is a highly entertaining performance.¹⁷ Constantine's whole attitude to woman is expressed in the following words: "Just as one man finds his amusement in balancing a cane upon his nose, in swinging a glass of water in a circle without its contents flying out, or in dancing among eggs, and other similar exercises which are as entertaining as they are profitable—so and not otherwise has the lover in commerce with his lady the most incomparable amusement and the most interesting study."¹⁸

Constantine ends his speech by referring to Plato and Aristotle¹⁹ who both are supposed to have regarded woman as an incomplete human form. However, says he, "In this life one must take her as she is."²⁰

According to Victor Eremita a woman is a creature so strange, so complex, so mixed, that no predicate can express it. Her misfortune is that, because of the romantic way in which she is regarded, her life becomes meaningless. At one moment she has the utmost significance, at the next moment none whatever.²¹ "If you will call the girl Juliana, then her life is as follows: 'aforetime Empress in love's far-reaching realm of exorbitant speech, and titular Queen of all the exaggerations of tom-foolery—now Madam Petersen at the corner of Bathhouse Street.' "²²

The significance of woman in the life of a man is of great importance for through her ideality came into the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 13, ascribes to woman "incomplete reflection." Plato, *Timaeus*, cap. 14, lets men who in the former life were imperfect become women in the next.

²⁰ *Stages*, p. 67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

world. Many a man became a genius, a hero, a poet, or a saint through a girl, but not through the girl he got. Each became a poet, a hero, a genius, or saint through the girl he didn't get.²³ In the words of Victor: "The highest thing, therefore, a woman can do for a man is to come within his range of vision at the right instant. . . . But then comes the greatest thing she can do for a man, and that is, to be unfaithful to him, the sooner the better."²⁴

As to marriage, he regards it as a dangerous positive relationship, something extremely complex and ambiguous, without inner unity: "A love affair is a simple thing after all—but a marriage! Is it something pagan or something Christian, or something pious, or something secular, or something civic, or a little of everything? Is it the expression of that inexplicable erotic sentiment, that harmonious elective affinity of souls, or is it a duty, a partnership, an expediency, the thing done in certain lands, or is it a little of everything?"²⁵

Victor Eremita waits in vain for a thought-unity that can bind together the scattered members of the most heterogeneous conceptions of life.²⁶

The Ladies' Tailor interprets woman as fashion. In his *maison* he has learned to know her without any theoretical fuss. Her category is fashion.²⁷ "A man is fortunate if he never takes up with any woman, in any case she doesn't belong to him, even if she doesn't belong to any other man, she belongs to that phantom which is formed by the unnatural intercourse of feminine reflection with feminine reflection, i.e., fashion."²⁸ To the Ladies' Tailor everything in life, from religion to hoop-skirts, is a matter of fashion. Since woman has reduced everything to fashion he will by the aid of fashion prostitute her as she deserves.²⁹

Johannes, the Seducer, is the last one to speak. He calls himself an erotic, and his categorical imperative is: Enjoy thyself. He expresses the wildest sensuality in the most fes-

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

²⁵ *Samlede Værker*, vi, p. 63. Translation mine. Cf. *Stages*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Stages*, p. 75.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

tive manner.³⁰ There is nothing more marvelous, nothing more delicious, nothing more seductive than a woman.³¹ "The gods fashioned her, delicate and ethereal as the mists of a summer night and yet plump like a ripened fruit, light as a bird in spite of the fact that she carries a world of craving, . . . slim of stature, designed with definite proportions and yet to the eye seeming to swell with the wave-lines of beauty, complete and yet as if only now she were finished, cooling, delicious, refreshing as new-fallen snow, blushing with serene transparency, . . . satisfying by being herself the incitement of desire."³²

Then follows something which is essential in Johannes' erotic conception of woman: "The gods made her perfect, but then they hid all this from her in the ignorance of innocence and hid it once more in the impenetrable mystery of modesty. . . . An enticing thing she was, at one moment she enticed by avoiding a man and betaking herself to flight, she was irresistible for the fact that she herself was resistance. . . . There is no allurement so absolute as that of innocence, and no temptation so fascinating as that of modesty, and no deception so incomparable as woman."³³ In the case of man the essential is the essential, and therefore always the same; in the case of woman the accidental is the essential, hence there is never one woman like another.³⁴

The banquet had come to an end. Each guest gave a parting salute with a full glass which he emptied and thereupon flung against the wall behind him.

Women and erotics form the subject of all the speeches in "*In Vino Veritas*." The personalities which appear are not ignorant of the ethical but they will have nothing to do with it. They refuse to assume any obligation or to enter into any binding relationships in life. Thus they express in their lives or "existentially" the fact that knowledge about the ethical is not synonymous with the ethical.

³⁰ Eduard Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard, Hans Livsudvikling og Forfattervirksomhed* (6 volumes, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag, 1926-1928), II, p. 119.

³¹ *Stages*, p. 84.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Kierkegaard himself furnishes an interpretation of the five characters: "The young man comes closest to being merely a possibility, and therefore he is still a hopeful case. He is essentially melancholy of thought. Constantine Constantius is case-hardened understanding. Victor Eremita is sympathetic irony. The Fashion Tailor is demoniac despair in passion. Johannes, the Seducer, is perdition in cold blood."³⁵ Johannes ends his speech with the proposition that woman is *only the moment*. According to Kierkegaard this is in its generality the essential aesthetic principle.³⁶

The judgment upon the aesthetic form of life lies in the very presentation of "*In Vino Veritas*." The instant the Seducer opens his mouth to speak one hears in every word the perdition and the condemnation.³⁷ It is the reader himself who is the judge. This is significantly expressed in the motto Kierkegaard affixed to "*In Vino Veritas*": "Solche werke sind Spiegel; wenn ein Affe hereinguckt, kann kein Apostel heraussehen."³⁸ As a man passes judgment upon this testimony, he reveals his own inner personality.

Either/Or, I, Kierkegaard's first pseudonymous work, contains the papers of a young man, merely designated as A. No doubt it is the same young man we met in "*In Vino Veritas*." The papers begin with the so-called "Diapsal-mata," which are scattered volcanic outbursts, exceedingly fascinating and expressive of the dissonance and despair of the aesthetic mode of life. Then follow seven brilliant aesthetic essays.

The first is "The Immediate Stages of the Erotic, or the Musical Erotic," which finds its concrete expression in Mozart's Don Juan. In his early youth Kierkegaard had studied with interest the three great medieval ideas, Don Juan (sensuality), Faust (doubt), and Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew (despair). Don Juan was associated with an intense experience in his youth. Thus he writes in his Jour-

³⁵ Postscript, p. 264.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 265.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 264.

³⁸ "Such works are mirrors; when a monkey peers into them, no apostle can look out." G. C. Lichtenberg, *Vermischte Schriften* (Göttingen, 1844), IV, p. 47.

nal: "In a certain sense I can say of Don Juan what Elvira says to him: 'Thou the murderer of my happiness'; . . . for in truth it is this play that has laid hold upon me so diabolically that I can no more forget it; it was this play which drove me, like Elvira, out of the calm night of the cloister."³⁹

In the essay the aestheticist presents the significance of the musical erotic. The musical erotic is delineated in three stages, the first two being preliminary to the third. The stages have this in common that they are immediately erotic and essentially musical.⁴⁰ In its mediate and reflective character the sensuous-erotic can express itself in the medium of language, and as such it becomes subject to ethical categories. Music on the other hand is the only medium that can express the sensuous-erotic in its immediacy,⁴¹ and in this function music does not appear as an accompaniment but as the essential expression of the idea.⁴² "The genius of sensuality is the absolute subject of music. The sensual genius is absolutely lyrical and it comes to expression in music in all its lyrical impatience. It is, namely, spiritually determined, and therefore it is force, life, movement, constant unrest, perpetual succession; but this unrest, this succession, does not enrich it, it remains always the same, it does not unfold itself, but it storms uninterruptedly forward as if in a single breath."⁴³

The first stage in the immediate erotic is suggested by the Page in *Figaro*.⁴⁴ One must be careful not to regard the Page as an individual but as an idea. "Therefore we cannot grant him speech, but music becomes his only adequate means of expression."⁴⁵ The characteristic of this stage, as expressed in the music, is that the sensual awakens, yet not to joy and gladness but to a deep melancholy. Desire itself is not yet awake but exists as a melancholy foreboding, as

³⁹ *Papirer*, II A 491; cf. *The Journals*, No. 296.

⁴⁰ *Either/Or* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), I, p. 47. Volume I translated by David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson; volume II translated by Walter Lowrie.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 54, 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-63.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

a presentiment about itself. In this stage desire has no specific object. "The desire is so indefinite, its object so little separated from it, that the object of desire rests androgynously within the desire, just as in plant life the male and female parts are both present in one blossom."⁴⁶

The second stage is represented by Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, but here again it is the idea and not the actual Papageno which is the interest of the aestheticist. The characteristic of this stage may be expressed in the following passage. "Desire awakens, the object flees, manifold in its revelation; the longing breaks away from the earth and starts out wandering. . . . Desire is directed toward the object, it is also moved within itself, the heart beats soundly and joyously, the objects swiftly vanish and reappear, but still before every disappearance is a present enjoyment, a moment of contact, short but sweet, evanescent as the gleam of a glow worm, inconstant and fleeting as the touch of a butterfly, and as harmless. . . . Only momentarily is a deeper desire suspected, but this suspicion is forgotten."⁴⁷ In Papageno desire aims at discoveries, but it discovers the manifold rather than the specific object of its search.

The third stage is represented by Don Juan. He is not regarded as a character but essentially as life. He is the personification of sensuality and in him the sensual genius has found perfect expression.⁴⁸ "The middle ages had much to say about a mountain, not found on any map, which was called the mountain of Venus. There the sensual had its home, there it had its own wild pleasures, for it was a kingdom, a state. In this kingdom language had no place, nor sober-minded thought, nor the toilsome business of reflection. There sounded only the voice of elemental passion, the play of appetites, the wild shouts of intoxication, those things which are enjoyed only in eternal tumult. The first-born in this kingdom is Don Juan."⁴⁹ The aestheticist significantly adds that it is not implied that it is a kingdom of sin. Only when reflection enters and thus destroys the aes-

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

thetic indifference does it appear as sin, but by that time Don Juan is slain and the music silent.

In the first stage desire is presented as *dreaming*, in the second as *seeking*, and in the third as *desiring*.⁵⁰ In Don Juan the sensual genius is qualified as seduction. Don Juan is by his very nature a seducer. His love is not psychical but sensual, and sensual love by its very concept is not faithful but absolutely perfidious. "He loves not one but all, that is to say, he seduces all."⁵¹

In Don Juan the whole power of sensuality is closely associated with dread: "There is dread in him, but this dread is his energy. It is not a subjectively reflected dread. . . . Don Juan's life is not despair; but it is the whole power of sensuality, which is born in dread, but this dread is precisely the demoniac joy of life."⁵²

The essay, "The Rotation Method," asserts that boredom is the root of all evil.⁵³ The gods were bored, so they created man; Adam was bored because he was alone, so Eve was created. Thus boredom came into the world and increased in size exactly in proportion to the increase of the population.⁵⁴ The remedy for boredom lies in a person's capacity for diversification of enjoyment. Hence one must guard against every permanent relationship, such as marriage, friendship, or a permanent occupation. The essay expresses the height of frivolity.

The last essay, "The Diary of the Seducer" pictures "a diabolically clever but thoroughly unmoral personality, an analogy to Don Juan, clothed in the garb of high intellectuality."⁵⁵ Johannes was too intellectual to be a seducer in the ordinary sense of the word. By means of his wonderful talents he knew just how to tempt a girl and to bring her to the culminating height where he was certain that she would sacrifice all. When he had brought her that far he would break with her. Yet on his part there had never been the slightest advance or a single word uttered about love.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁵⁵ David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ *Either/Or*, I, p. 254.

In the diary we learn how he in the most diabolic and yet refined manner seduces Cordelia, a talented young girl. He becomes engaged to her. He wins her unqualified devotion. Step by step he leads her to see that an outward tie, such as an engagement, is only a hindrance to love. Abhorring entering into such a vulgar relationship as marriage, she breaks off the engagement to become his paramour. Then he abandons her.

Several of the essays among the papers of A are addressed to Συμπαρανεκρωμένοι,⁵⁷ something which indicates the aestheticist's distance and foreignness to life.

The first insight into the aesthetic life is gained from the "Diapsalmata." They express the emptiness, despair, and the split existence of such a mode of life. In order to gain an appreciation of the artistry of Kierkegaard's presentation and also to get "the feel" of the type of life he describes, it is necessary to quote extensively.

The first diapsalm reads: "What is a poet? A poet is an unhappy being whose heart is torn by secret sufferings, but whose lips are so strangely formed that when the sighs and the cries escape them, they sound like beautiful music. His fate is like that of the unfortunate victims whom the tyrant Phalaris imprisoned in a brazen bull, and slowly tortured over a steady fire; their cries could not reach the tyrant's ears so as to strike terror into his heart; when they reached his ears they sounded like sweet music. And men crowd about the poet and say to him: 'Sing for us soon again'; that is as much as to say: 'May new sufferings torment your soul, but may your lips be formed as before; for the cries would only frighten us, but the music is delicious.' And the critics come, too, and say: 'Quite correct, and so it ought to be, according to the rules of aesthetics.' Now it is understood that a critic resembles a poet to a hair; he only lacks the suffering in his heart, and the music upon his lips. Lo, therefore I would rather be a swineherd . . . and be under-

⁵⁷ To "those, including myself, who are already dead."

stood by the swine, than be a poet and be misunderstood by men.”⁵⁸

Concerning this diapsalm Kierkegaard says⁵⁹ that it posits a tremendous dissonance, a total break with reality, the reason for which is not found in vanity, but in melancholy and its predominance over reality. The last of the diapsalms reads: “Something wonderful has happened to me. I was carried up into the seventh heaven. There all the gods sat assembled. By special grace I was granted the favor of a wish. ‘Will you,’ said Mercury, ‘have youth, or beauty, or power, or a long life, or the most beautiful of maidens, or any other of the glories we have in the chest? Choose, but only one thing.’ For a moment I was at a loss. Then I addressed myself to the gods as follows: ‘Most honorable contemporaries, I choose this one thing, that I may always have the laugh on my side.’ Not one of the gods said a word, on the contrary, they all began to laugh. Hence, I concluded that my request was granted, and found that the gods knew how to express themselves with taste; for it would hardly have been suitable for them to have answered gravely: ‘It is granted thee.’ ”⁶⁰

Concerning this diapsalm Kierkegaard says⁶¹ that it shows how this type of life finds its satisfactory expression in laughter. With the help of laughter he pays his debt to reality. “His enthusiasm is too vital, his sympathy too deep, his love too burning, his heart too warm to express itself otherwise than in the contrary.”⁶²

A fundamental characteristic of the aestheticist is his lack of continuity, his inability to cope with time. “Time flows, life is a stream, people say, and so on. I do not notice it. Time stands still, and I with it. All the plans I make fly right back upon myself; when I would spit, I even spit into my own face.”⁶³

The aestheticist is a “traveling scholastic” rushing through life. He is satiated and tired of everything, yet he

⁵⁸ *Either/Or*, I, p. 15.

⁵⁹ *The Journals*, No. 469.

⁶⁰ *Either/Or*, I, p. 34.

⁶¹ *The Journals*, No. 469.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Either/Or*, I, p. 20.

hungers.⁶⁴ He recognizes no relationship between cause and effect. At one moment a very small and insignificant effect results from tremendous and powerful causes, at other times the effect is altogether lacking, or an insignificant cause will produce a gigantic effect.⁶⁵ He has no permanent friendships; his only friend is echo, and his only confidant the silence of the night.⁶⁶ Neither is there any permanence in his relationship to women. "Their beauty perishes like a dream, as yesterday when it is passed. . . . Either they are faithless, which gives me no further occupation, or they are faithful. If I found such a one the contemplation of her rarity would please me, but the contemplation of the duration of her faithfulness would not be pleasing. For if she remains faithful, I should become the sacrifice of my experimenting zeal, since I should have to endure her. If on the other hand at any time she ceased to be faithful, I should have the old story over again."⁶⁷

The life of the aestheticist is empty and void of meaning, or its meanings are incongruous or entirely distorted:

"My life is absolutely meaningless. When I consider the different periods into which it falls, it seems like the word *Schnur* in the dictionary, which means in the first place a string, in the second, a daughter-in-law. The only thing lacking is that the word *Schnur* should mean in the third place a camel, in the fourth, a dust-brush."⁶⁸

"My view of life is utterly meaningless. I suppose an evil spirit has set a pair of spectacles upon my nose, of which one lens is a tremendously powerful magnifying glass, the other an equally powerful reducing glass."⁶⁹

"The disproportion in my build is that my forelegs are too short. Like the kangaroo, I have very short forelegs, and tremendously long hind legs. Ordinarily I sit quite still; but if I move, the tremendous leap that follows strikes terror to all my acquaintances, friends and relatives."⁷⁰

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ *Samlede Værker*, I, p. 14. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, I, p. 23.

⁶⁸ *Either/Or*, I, p. 29.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

According to Carl Koch⁷¹ the last of the above diapsalms describes the spiritual gait of the aestheticist. In relationship to daily work, duties, and civic life he sits entirely still, but at times he makes a tremendous leap when at a festive occasion he displays an intellectual brilliance so captivating that he astonishes all.

His life is a life of pleasure, but pleasure has left him disappointed and melancholy:

"There are well-known insects which die in the moment of fecundation. So it is with all joy; life's supreme and richest moment of pleasure is coupled with death."⁷²

"Wine no longer makes my heart glad; a little of it makes me sad, much makes me melancholy. My soul is faint and impotent; in vain I prick the spur of pleasure into its flank, its strength is gone, it rises no more to the royal leap. I have lost my illusions. Vainly I seek to plunge myself into the boundless sea of joy; it cannot sustain me, or rather, I cannot sustain myself."⁷³

The aestheticist looks with disdain upon all who are engaged in the common tasks of life; he does not tackle the problems of life.⁷⁴ "I am like a Lüneberger pig. My thinking is a passion. I can root up truffles excellently for other people, even if I get no pleasures out of them myself. I dig the problems out with my nose, but the only thing I can do with them is to throw them back over my head."⁷⁵

Furthermore the aestheticist has lost what is termed "*the possibility*." "My soul has lost the possibility. If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for myself a kingdom or power, but the passion of the possibility, the eye which always young, always blazing, beholds the possibility."⁷⁶ He is a melancholy soul bound with chains "formed of dark imaginings, of unquiet dreams, of restless thoughts, of dread presentiments, of inexplicable anxieties."⁷⁷ His life is a poet-existence with a great rift between ideality and

⁷¹ Carl Koch, *Søren Kierkegaard*, anden forægdede Udgave. Copenhagen: Det Schønbergske Forlag, 1925.

⁷² *Either/Or*, I, p. 15. ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 33. ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷⁶ *Samlede Værker*, I, p. 22. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, I, p. 33.

⁷⁷ *Either/Or*, I, p. 27.

reality. The color mixtures of his childhood find no counterpart in life itself. The bright colors which life had in childhood gradually become too strong and glaring for his weak eyes.⁷⁸ The rift between ideality and reality is a source of deep disappointment and results in the crisis described in another diapsalm. "As it befell Parmeniscus in the legend, who in the cave of Trophonius lost the power to laugh, but got it again on the island of Delos, at the sight of the shapeless block exhibited there as the image of the goddess Leto, so it has befallen me. When I was young, I forgot how to laugh in the cave of Trophonius; when I was older, I opened my eyes and beheld reality, at which I began to laugh, and since then I have not stopped laughing. I saw that the meaning of life was to secure a livelihood, and that its goal was to attain a high position; that love's rich dream was marriage with an heiress; that friendship's blessing was help in financial difficulties; that wisdom was what the majority assumed it to be; that enthusiasm consisted in making a speech; that it was courage to risk the loss of ten dollars; that kindness consisted in saying, 'You are welcome,' at the dinner table; that piety consisted in going to communion once a year. This I saw, and I laughed."⁷⁹ The expression "I forgot how to laugh" may refer to the awakening of the seriousness of youth, when he could no longer be satisfied with the amusements of childhood. With the discovery of life's hideous seriousness a bitter laughter breaks forth which is altogether different from the cheerful laughter of childhood.⁸⁰

The aesthetic life is the unrevealed life. There is always the possibility of a double meaning in the laughter of the aestheticist. "What if everything in the world were a misunderstanding; what if laughter were tears?"⁸¹ The aestheticist is enigmatical, not only in relationship to others, but in relationship to himself.⁸² His outward appearance is happy and joyous, but within there is despair and bitter resentment toward all men.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 27. ⁸⁰ Koch, *Søren Kierkegaard*, p. 31.
⁸¹ *Either/Or*, I, p. 16. ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The aestheticist has as his motto, "either/or," but his either/or does not designate a choice. This is expressed in "An ecstatic lecture" among the diapsalms: "If you marry, you will regret it; if you do not marry you will also regret it; if you marry or do not marry, you will regret both; whether you marry or do not marry, you will regret both. Laugh at the world's follies, you will regret it; weep over them, you will also regret that; laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you will regret both; whether you laugh at the world's follies or weep over them, you will regret both. Believe a woman, you will regret it, believe her not, you will also regret that; believe a woman, or believe her not, you will regret both; whether you believe a woman or believe her not you will regret both. Hang yourself, you will regret it; do not hang yourself, and you will also regret that; hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both; whether you hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret both. This, gentlemen, is the sum and substance of all philosophy."⁸³

The opposites of life are real and distinct, but it is a matter of indifference whether one chooses one thing or another. The aestheticist explains his "either/or" in the following terms: "For this . . . is my motto, and these words are not, as the grammarians believe, disjunctive conjunctions; no, they belong inseparably together and therefore ought to be written as one word, inasmuch as in their union they constitute an interjection which I shout at mankind, just as boys shout 'Hep' after a Jew."⁸⁴

There is in this "either/or" a nihilistic passion, which also finds expression in another diapsalm found among Kierkegaard's sketches, but not included in *Either/Or*. "These words either/or are a double edged little dagger which I carry with me and with which I can assassinate all of reality. I say namely either/or. Either it is this, or it is that; and since nothing in life can be either this or that, it is not at all. I have seen jugglers do their tricks, heard them pronounce the magic word, seen the crowd amazed,

⁸³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 30-31.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 135

yet I have accomplished things far more wonderful with my magic formula. One may explain away everything—in this way one may help oneself splendidly. The art is always to live in such a manner that one's personality has a little of everything. In that way no devil can ever get wise to him: either he is a deceiver, there are certain things that point in this direction—or he is not, there is something which suggests this—ergo he is not at all, i.e. ergo let him stay, as the farmer said about the round tower.”⁸⁵ Another note reads, “‘Either/or’ is the talisman with which one may annihilate the whole world.”⁸⁶ Thus the real meaning of “either/or” has been inverted; instead of leading to choice, it prevents it. The aestheticist marches seven times around existence, blows the trumpet, and permits the whole thing to collapse.⁸⁷

The aesthetic form of life is that of a poet-existence. He sees the ideals, but he retreats from the world in order to enjoy them.⁸⁸ The aesthetic life is basically paradoxical. This paradoxicalness the aestheticist cannot express in continuity, or in theory, hence it is illustrated in the disconnected diapsalms. The aestheticist finds his escape from reality in the bitter laughter of despair. By means of this laughter he soars above and beyond all the demands of life. This form of life Kierkegaard regards as irony.⁸⁹

While the Hegelian philosophers mediate the contradictions of life in a higher unity, the aestheticist does not go beyond the principle of contradiction. In a sense his position is more consistent than theirs, for his is the domain of action, while theirs is the domain of contemplation. He recognizes the contradictions of life, but maintains that they are equally valid, i.e., he is indifferent to the contradictions. The distinctions between the two positions is expressed in the sentence, “You [the aestheticist] mediate contradictions in a higher madness, philosophy mediates them in a higher unity.”⁹⁰ This mediation in a higher madness

⁸⁵ *Papirer*, III B 179:62. Translation mine. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, III B 179:27.

⁸⁷ *Either/Or*, II, p. 136.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸⁹ Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, II, p. 48.

⁹⁰ *Either/Or*, II, p. 144.

is an expression for the paradoxical in the aestheticist's attitude to life. He says, "I can either do this or do that, but whichever of the two I do is equally mad, ergo I do nothing at all."⁹¹ His philosophy has but one principle, and he does not even proceed from that, for if he does, he will regret it, and if he does not he will regret it. Since he never begins, he never stops. Says he, "My eternal departure is identical with my eternal cessation."⁹² The aestheticist is indifferent to the realities of life. His attitude is that of immediacy, and immediacy is this *indetermination*. In immediacy there is no relationship to life. As soon as the relationship is present immediacy is abrogated. "When the consciousness remains in immediacy the distinctions between right and wrong are abrogated."⁹³

A formal presentation of the aesthetic stage is found in the papers of Judge William in *Either/Or*, II. The goal of the aesthetic life is always regarded as enjoyment.⁹⁴ The formula for the aesthetic life is: "He who says that he wants to enjoy life always posits a condition which lies outside the individual or is in the individual in such a way that it is not posited by the individual himself."⁹⁵ That there are different modes within the aesthetic life, ranging from the cool, deliberate thought of the young man to the diabolic sensuality of the Seducer, was indicated by Kierkegaard's interpretation of the characters of "*In Vino Veritas*." The ethicist in *Either/Or*, II, calls attention to five aesthetic modes of life.⁹⁶

1. The mode of life which regards health as the highest good. The poetical expression for this mode is: Beauty is the highest good. The personality is immediately determined as physical, and the condition for enjoyment lies beyond the individual himself, since it is not posited by him.
2. The mode of life which finds the goal and content of

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, I, p. 31.

⁹³ *Papirer*, IV B, pp. 145-146.

⁹⁴ *Either/Or*, II, p. 152.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-165.

life in riches, honor, position, etc. The condition is again outside the individual.

3. The mode which finds the meaning of life in the development of a talent. In this case the condition is within the personality, yet relatively external, since it is not determined by the personality.

4. The mode of life which strives to satisfy one's taste for pleasure. The condition is again external to the personality.

5. According to Kierkegaard every aesthetic mode of life is despair, hence the most refined and superior aesthetic mode is despair itself. It is aesthetic since the personality remains in its immediacy. This view possesses a consciousness of the emptiness of such a *Lebensanschauung*. However the despair is not actual, but a thought-despair.⁹⁷

The aestheticist lives in the moment, and in the moment he possesses supernatural strength.⁹⁸ His life has no continuity.⁹⁹ He lives in a world of poetry, sentiments, and memories, apart from the world of realities.¹⁰⁰ He prides himself in being *observateur*.¹⁰¹ While he pursues every sentiment and thought to the extreme, it is always *in abstracto* rather than *in concreto*.¹⁰²

The goal of the aesthetic life is to enjoy life. Its first characteristic is immediacy.¹⁰³ "The aesthetical in a man is that by which he is immediately what he is."¹⁰⁴ The second characteristic is that the aesthetical has its condition outside the personality, or, within the personality but in such a manner that it is not the individual's contribution to himself (e.g., beauty). In Kierkegaard's works the last thought is expressed in the two difficult sentences: "What constitutes the situation as aesthetical is the fact that the individual becomes undialectical in himself";¹⁰⁵ "If the individual is in himself undialectical and has his dialectic outside himself, then we have the *aesthetic interpretation*."¹⁰⁶

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 165, 167.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 120, 122.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰³ *Postscript*, p. 507.

¹⁰⁴ *Either/Or*, II, p. 150.

¹⁰⁵ *Postscript*, p. 478.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

The aesthetic mode of life leads to isolation from society. The individual has himself as the greatest good and the goal in life; everything else becomes a tool to this end. The individual is magnified and society becomes insignificant. The aesthetic stage may be regarded as a-ethical and a-religious. The aesthetical does not have the nature of evil but the nature of indifference.¹⁰⁷

We turn now to the remedy for the aesthetic mode of life. According to Judge William, despair is not only the bankruptcy of the aesthetic life, it is its only remedy. "What then must you do? I have only one answer: 'Despair!'"¹⁰⁸ But this despair must not be regarded as a comfort, or as a condition in which one is to remain; it is an action which, according to the judge, requires *all the strength of the personality*. "So, then, despair with all your soul and with all your mind; the longer you put it off, the harder the conditions become, and the demand remains the same. I shout this to you, like the woman who offered to sell to Tarquin a collection of books and when he would not give the sum she demanded burned one-third of them and demanded the same sum, and when again he would not give the sum she demanded burned another third of them and demanded the same sum, until finally he gave the original sum for the last third."¹⁰⁹ And again: "So then choose despair, for even despair is a choice; for one can doubt without choosing to, but one cannot despair without choosing. And when a man despairs he chooses again—and what is it he chooses? He chooses himself, not in his immediacy, not as this fortuitous individual, but he chooses himself in his eternal validity."¹¹⁰

In Kierkegaard's use of the terms "doubt" and "despair" there is an intended play upon the two Danish words *tvivl* and *fortvivlelse*. The Danish terms correspond to the German *Zweifel* and *Verzweiflung*. *Tvivl* is the despair of the intellect, and is always regarded by Kierkegaard as belong-

¹⁰⁷ *Either/Or*, II, p. 143.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 175.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

ing to the realm of logic and therefore subject to necessity. *Fortvivelse* is the despair of the personality. Judge William looks forward to the time when the philosophical point of departure in search for the Absolute is no longer doubt (*Zweifel*) but despair (*Verzweifelung*).¹¹¹ Such a philosophy would find its starting point not in thought but in existence, that is, in life itself.

If we ask why such a choosing as mentioned above can be a remedy for the aesthetic life, how it can redeem the personality from its immediacy and discontinuity, the answer of Judge William is that to choose is a stringent expression for the ethical. Whenever there is an either/or in the stricter sense, the ethical is present.¹¹² It is not a question of choosing this or that, but of choosing oneself in one's eternal validity. By despairing and choosing oneself in one's eternal validity, the deeper and ethical level of personality emerges. That the restoration of a personality broken down by sin was not quite as simple as Judge William's advice to the aestheticist, Kierkegaard knew perfectly well. In a lengthy notation¹¹³ on *Either/Or* he points out the imperfection of the book, namely, that the transition from the aesthetical to the ethical stage cannot be carried out in the manner suggested by Judge William. Kierkegaard states that the judge himself must have been aware of this, but that the imperfection was unavoidable since the judge confined himself to the ethical only. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* the pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus points to the same difficulty when he desires to whisper a little secret in Judge William's ear, and he is quite sure that the judge "will concede there are difficulties he did not take into account."¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 179.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 141-143, 150.

¹¹³ *Papirer*, IV B 57, p. 214.

¹¹⁴ *Postscript*, p. 161.

CHAPTER III

THE ETHICAL STAGE

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Ethics says that it is the significance of life and of reality that every man become revealed.<sup>1</sup>

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NOWHERE does Kierkegaard present what might be termed a system of ethics. Instead he confronts his readers with an ethical way of living as exhibited in the person of Judge William, one of Kierkegaard's literary characters. An ethical life is not identical with a person's intellectual views and opinions. Thus Judge William has very pronounced religious convictions, but his mode of existence is ethical rather than religious.

The principal sources for the ethical stage are *Either/Or*, II, and "Various Observations about Marriage" in *Stages on Life's Way*. The principal character is Judge William. We shall present a review of the argument of Judge William in both of these sources, followed by a summary of the main ethical categories. In a later chapter we shall consider Kierkegaard's more advanced ethical position as presented in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.²

In the second volume of *Either/Or* are the papers of the ethicist who is designated as B. We are informed that his name is William, and that he is a magistrate in one of the lower courts. The papers are made up of two essays in the form of letters of admonition and are directed to the young aestheticist. It also includes Judge William's ultimatum to the aestheticist in the form of a sermon by a country parson.

According to Hegel the norm of ethics was to be objectively and not subjectively determined. He rejected the autonomy of the individual in matters of ethics. Any deviation from the universal was viewed with suspicion. Though not a Hegelian Judge William accepts this Hege-

¹ *Either/Or*, II, p. 269.

² See Chapter VII.

lian position, a position which is also expressed in *Fear and Trembling*. "The ethical is the universal and as such divine." "The ethical as such is the universal, it applies to everyone, and the same thing is expressed from another point of view by saying that it applies every instant."³ The ethical is identified with the universal-human. It is therefore quite natural that to Judge William marriage as the universal becomes the characteristic way of realizing the ethical.

The first essay of *Either/Or*, II, "The Aesthetic Validity of Marriage," argues that the purpose of marriage is to combine the romantic with the ethical and religious. To Judge William marriage is a mutual relationship of sharing. It is not cold, unpoetic, unerotic, and without beauty. Marriage—as conceived by Christianity—he argues, is just as aesthetical as religious.⁴ Romantic love (also called the first love or immediate love) is the physical basis of marriage, but marriage has an ethical and religious element which the first love does not possess.⁵ The basic characteristic for a true marriage, and as such a characteristic of the ethical, is an openness on the greatest possible scale. Secretiveness is its death.⁶ But such an openness requires, according to the judge, great courage and a decisive step, which if lacking reduce marriage to an unreality.⁷ "Sincerity, openheartedness, manifestation, understanding—these constitute the life-principle of marriage, without which it becomes ugly and indeed immoral. Without these that which love unites, the sensual and the spiritual, is separated. Only when the person with whom I live in the most tender relationship in this earthly life is equally close to me in a spiritual sense, can my marriage be moral and therefore aesthetically beautiful. . . . Mutual understanding is the life-principle of marriage."⁸ It is the task of conjugal love to become historical, that is, to gain and mani-

³ *Fear and Trembling*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 79, 102.

⁴ *Either/Or*, II, pp. 8, 9. ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁸ *Samlede Værker*, II, p. 106. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, p. 98.

fest continuity.⁹ Aesthetic love has its concentration in the moment, and the more intense the concentration the greater the aesthetic effect.¹⁰ While the aestheticist lives in the moment, the true individual lives at the same time both in the hope (the future reference) and in the recollection (the past reference). This gives to his life richness and continuity.¹¹

One circumstance is mentioned under which one must advise against marriage, namely when a person's life has become so involved that he cannot reveal himself. "If the history of your inward development possesses something unutterable, if your life has made you participant in secrets, if in one manner or another you have devoured a secret which cannot be elicited from you except at the cost of your life, do not ever marry."¹²

In the second essay, "Equilibrium between the Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Composition of Personality," Judge William argues that what he has said about love and marriage has its application to all of life. Life must be ethical in order to become aesthetically beautiful. The first part of the essay presents the collision of the aesthetic and the ethical views of life. The latter part is a development of the ethical view of life.

The ethicist takes his place in the social order. In working for a living he finds an expression for the beautiful and perfect.¹³ He maintains that *every human being has a calling*. What the calling is one man cannot tell another, for that would require a knowledge of the aesthetic element in his personality, and furthermore it would not be ethical to choose for another. The aestheticist's philosophy pays attention to the variations in life. Some men are talented, others not. Nevertheless the distinction between them is a question of a "more or less," or a quantitative determination. The ethicist reconciles individual existence with the social order. He does not destroy the individual variations, but maintains that in all the human differen-

⁹ *Either/Or*, II, pp. 99, 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹² *Samlede Værker*, II, p. 106. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, p. 98.

¹³ *Either/Or*, II, pp. 240, 242.

tiae the universal remains, that every man has a calling. The most eminently talented does not stand outside the realm of the universal-human, for his talent is a calling. Even the most insignificant human being has a calling. He is not to be referred to the confinium of the animals but to remain within the universal. The ethical statement, that every man has a calling, is thus an expression for a rational order of things, in which every man fills his place in such a manner that he at the same time expresses both the universal and the individual.¹⁴

To the ethicist marriage is the universal-human, and hence *it is the duty of every man to marry*.¹⁵ Not that it is sinful to remain single, but it is sinful willfully to refuse to realize the universal. The ethical is the universal, and therefore the abstract. Hence the ethicist can only inform a person that it is his duty to marry. He cannot tell him whom he is to marry. That would require a knowledge of the aesthetic element in his personality. The ethical brings a person into harmony with the order of existence; as the exception he would be in conflict with it.¹⁶

Friendship is also regarded as universal, hence *it is the duty of every man to have a friend*.¹⁷ But since the fundamental condition for real friendship is held to be agreement in the moral view of life, the ethical aspect of friendship may be expressed in the statement, *It is the duty of every man to be revealed*. "Ethics says that it is the significance of life and of reality that every man become revealed. . . . The aestheticist, on the contrary will not attribute significance to reality, he remains constantly concealed,"¹⁸ and does not face the demands of the reality of life. And "he who will not grapple with the realities, grapples with phantoms."¹⁹ In the statement, *It is the duty of every man to become revealed*, lies a fundamental difference between the ethical and aesthetic modes of life.²⁰

The third essay, the sermon of the country parson, is

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 244.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 252, 255.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹⁹ *Samlede Værker*, II, p. 289. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, p. 270.

²⁰ *Papirer*, IV A 234.

Judge William's "Ultimatum" to A. The subject is: "The edification implied in the thought that as against God we are always in the wrong." This constitutes *Either/Or*'s attempt at a solution of the dissonance in the life of the aestheticist. Recognition of one's own insignificance, and resignation to the absolute superiority and righteousness of God is the solvent. *Thus the ethical stage is an approach to the religious but, mark well, the Christian categories of sin and faith are not touched. The whole solution lies within the realm of human immanence.* The discourse ends with the words, "Only the truth which edifies is truth for you." *Thus the question of truth is consigned to the sphere of personality and truth is determined as inwardness.* The decisive characterization as edifying for you, that is for the subject, "constitutes its essential difference from all objective knowledge, in that the subjectivity itself becomes the mark of truth."²¹

In the essays of *Either/Or*, II, Judge William appears as the insistent admonisher of his young friend the aestheticist. In "Various Observations about Marriage" (the second part of *Stages*) we find him intrenched in the sacred institution of marriage, boldly defending his position against every enemy.²² To the Judge every acquaintance with life apart from marriage is superficial in comparison to that acquired by the married man, for only the married man has thoroughly fathomed the depths of life.²³ In a certain sense every married man knows what the Judge knows; for the leading thoughts, like the consonants in Hebrew, are the same. But while the consonants (the universals) remain unaltered, one may find pleasure in adding new vowels, and thus find new meaning in the words (the particular).²⁴

Judge William regards marriage as the greatest end or ideal of human existence. The main thing about marriage is that it is an end to be achieved. But as an end it must not be regarded as something immediate or as a blind urge of

²¹ *Postscript*, p. 226. ²² *Stages*, p. 100. ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 97. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

nature, a biological necessity. A true marriage belongs to the realm of freedom and is achieved only by a resolution of the will.²⁵ "The difficulty is this: love or being in love is something entirely immediate. Marriage is a resolution. Yet love is to be comprehended in marriage or in a resolution, i.e., a decision to marry. This implies that love, the most immediate of all things, also is the freest resolution; love which is so inexplicable in its immediacy that it must be ascribed to a divinity also shall be by virtue of a deliberation so exhaustive that it issues in a resolution. Furthermore, the one must not be the result of the other. The resolution must not follow trudgingly behind but must take place at the same time. Both must be together in the moment of decision."²⁶

Romantic love, or immediate love is simply regarded as a given fact, a miracle, a gift of the Deity. No thought can approach it.²⁷ "The only right, brief, pithy, adequate word for the whole content of love is: I love her."²⁸ Every attempt of reflection to explain it is as a matter of course condemned to failure. Whenever the understanding attempts to explain or to think love, it becomes ridiculous.²⁹

In marriage a resolution is superadded to love, and this resolution is regarded as a new immediacy.³⁰ "The resolution is a religious life view constructed upon ethical postulates . . . it is a religious starting point."³¹ The Judge argues:³² The resolution wants to hold fast to love, but it is also anxious to triumph over all dangers confronting love. Hence it employs all the power of thought as well as the deep concern of love to think the danger, and think it in so dreadful an aspect that the lover cannot by himself overcome it. The alternatives become: either to let go of love or to believe in God. In this manner the miracle of love is elevated to a purely religious miracle. Finally, in the resolution the lover puts himself in relationship to God

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁶ *Samlede Værker*, vi, p. 99. Translation mine. Cf. *Stages on Life's Way*, pp. 107 f.

²⁷ *Stages*, pp. 124, 126, 147. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123, 126.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159. ³¹ *Ibid.* ³² *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

through the universal. Thus marriage receives a religious background.

In *Either/Or*, II,³³ the Judge spoke of an ethical exception to marriage. In *Stages* he suggests the possibility of a religious exception to marriage or to the universal: "I do not say that marriage is the highest, I know a higher, but woe to him who would skip over marriage without justification. . . . Such a religious exception will ignore the universal, he will outbid the terms offered by temporal reality."³⁴

After a cursory review of the argument of Judge William in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*, it remains to point out the main ethical categories.

There are people to whose lives no either/or is applicable, whose lives are spent in silent perdition. Their lives, instead of being a successive unfolding, are exhausted and spent. They do not live aesthetically nor do they live ethically; they are neither one thing nor another.³⁵ They are too dissolute to understand the dilemma of a choice and their personalities lack the energy to say with pathos: either/or.³⁶ According to Judge William there is only one situation where the words either/or have absolute significance, namely, whenever truth, righteousness, and holiness appear on the one side and desires, base dispositions, sordid passions, and perdition on the other. However, even in more innocent matters it is important to choose the right thing and to examine oneself.³⁷

To choose is a stringent expression for the ethical. Whenever there is a question of an either/or in the strict sense of the word, the ethical is present. The only absolute either/or is the choice between good and evil, but that is also absolutely ethical. The aesthetic choice is either entirely immediate, that is, relatively undisturbed by reflection, and as such it is really no choice, or it loses itself in a

³³ *Either/Or*, II, p. 98. ³⁴ *Stages*, pp. 166, 170. ³⁵ *Either/Or*, II, p. 142.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

multiplicity of possibilities, and cannot arrive at a decisive either/or.³⁸

In dealing with the subject of choice Judge William does not neglect the opportunity to speak his mind about Hegelianism, the current philosophy of that day. He chides this philosophy for directing its attention to the past and for mediating the various discursive moments in a higher unity, while failing to give an answer to the question of the future. In the realm of thought Hegelianism can easily enough mediate the contradictions, but only with reference to things which are past, for in order to mediate the contradictions they must belong to the past. Whenever the contradictions are present there is also an either/or.³⁹ At this point we quote the weighty words of the judge: "As truly as there is a future, so there is an either/or. . . . Philosophy, on the contrary, has maintained that there is an absolute mediation. This is of course of supreme importance for philosophy, for if one abandons mediation, one also abandons speculation. On the other hand it is a precarious thing to accept mediation, for if one accepts it, there is no absolute choice, and consequently no absolute either/or."⁴⁰ To speak about a higher unity which shall unite absolute contradictions, such as good and evil, is according to Kierkegaard a metaphysical attempt to assassinate all ethics.⁴¹

"The important thing is not to cultivate one's mind but to mature one's personality."⁴² Choice is of paramount importance in the maturing of the personality, for that which is chosen is in the deepest sense connected with the person who chooses. In choosing, the personality merges with the object which is chosen—hence personality is molded in the choice. Without choice the personality deteriorates.⁴³ To fail to choose or to let others choose for one is to lose one's personality.⁴⁴ The choice is an act of freedom, and it may

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, p. 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴⁰ *Samlede Værker*, II, p. 157. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, p. 146.

⁴¹ *Papirer*, v A 68, 90. ⁴² *Either/Or*, II, p. 137. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 138, 149 f.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

well be said that in the act of choosing the individual produces himself.

It is important to note that the Judge does not place the emphasis upon the objective reality of the chosen, but upon the subjective reality of the act of choosing, upon the energy, seriousness, and pathos of the choice.⁴⁵ But suppose a man should choose the wrong thing? If a choice is effected with all the inwardness of the personality, one's nature is *purified* and one is brought into immediate relationship with the Eternal Power which is everywhere present and permeates all of existence. According to Judge William, this will prevent a man from permanently choosing the wrong.⁴⁶ When a man is brought to the crossroads where there is no escape for him but to choose, he will choose the right.⁴⁷ One may object that the Judge is taking too much for granted. But when he speaks of a choice or an either/or, he is not concerned with a choosing of this or that, not even the choosing of good and evil. Says he, "My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good *and* evil / or excludes them."⁴⁸ He who thus chooses to let the categories of good and evil have *absolute significance* in his life confirms the principle of contradiction. Such a choice gives life meaning and continuity.

To Judge William the fundamental ethical choice is the choice of a self, but this self is not a mythical or abstract self, it is historically conditioned, and has a history in time. While in the moment of choice the individual withdraws himself from his surroundings in complete isolation, he at the same time becomes conscious of himself as a definite individual, with particular dispositions, talents, and passions, influenced and molded by definite surroundings. As he becomes conscious of himself in relation to his environment, he assumes responsibility for himself.⁴⁹ "He has his place in the world, with freedom he chooses his place," that is, he "chooses himself as a concretion determined in

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

manifold ways, and he chooses himself therefore in accord with his continuity."⁵⁰ It is this concretion which constitutes the reality of the individual as well as his task.

The psychological process in which a person chooses to despair and finds his real self, and the return to a positive relation to life is brought out in the following illustration which is quoted in full: "Imagine a young man as talented as you are. Let him love a girl, love her as dearly as himself. Let him once ponder in a quiet hour upon what it is he has constructed his life and upon what she can construct hers. Love they have in common, and yet he feels there are differences. She possesses, perhaps, the gift of beauty, but this has no importance for him and, after all, it is so fragile; she has, perhaps, the joyful temper of youth, but that joy has no great significance for him, but he possesses the power of the mind and feels the might of it. He desires to love her in truth, and it never occurs to him to attribute this power to her, and her meek soul does not demand it, and yet there is a difference, and he will feel that this must be done away if he is to love her in truth. Then he will let his soul sink into despair. It is not for his own sake he despairs but for hers, and yet it is for his own sake too, for he loves her as dearly as himself. Then will despair devour everything till he finds *himself* in his eternal validity, but then he has also found her, and no knight can return more happily and gladly from the most perilous adventure than does he from this fight with flesh and blood and the vain differences of the finite, for he who despairs finds the eternal man, and in that we are all equal. The foolish thought of wishing to dull his mind or neglect its culture will not occur to him as a way of bringing about equality; he will preserve the gifts of the mind, but in his inmost heart he knows of himself that he who possesses these gifts is like one who possesses them not."⁵¹

At the end of the last chapter it was pointed out that Judge William's remedy for the aesthetic life—a life which in its extreme culmination is described as "despair in

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-211.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

thought" or intellectual despair⁵²—was to despair with all one's soul and with all one's might.⁵³ Doubt (*Tvivl*) as such is despair of thought, it is an inward movement of thought itself, and is subject to necessity and the rules of logic.⁵⁴ Doubt is therefore a purely objective attitude. Despair (*Fortvivelse*), on the other hand, is a subjective attitude. It involves the whole personality and belongs in the realm of freedom. One cannot despair without willing it. According to Judge William the true point of departure in the search for the absolute is not doubt but despair. "When one has willed despair one has truly chosen that which despair chooses, i.e., oneself in one's eternal validity . . . for I never despair by necessity but by freedom, and only thereby does one win the absolute."⁵⁵ And again: "But what is it I choose? Is it this thing or that? No for I choose absolutely, and the absoluteness of my choice is expressed precisely in the fact that I have not chosen to choose this or that. I choose the absolute. And what is the absolute? It is myself in my eternal validity. Anything else but myself I never can choose as the absolute, for if I choose something else, I choose it as a finite thing and do not choose it absolutely."⁵⁶

The moment of choice and its significance for personality is poetically described in the following quotation: "Now I wish to state that to choose gives to a human nature a solemnity and a dignity which can never be entirely lost. There are those who attach an extraordinary value to having at some moment seen one or another outstanding world-historical personality face to face. Yet such a moment, however significant is nothing in comparison to the moment of choice. When everything about one has become quiet and solemn as a starlit night, when the soul is alone in the whole world, there appears over against it, not some distinguished personality, but the eternal power itself. Then as it were, heaven opens itself above the soul, and the 'self' chooses itself or rather it receives itself. Then

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁵³ *Supra*, p. 36.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

⁵⁴ *Either/Or*, II, p. 178.

the soul has seen the highest, what no mortal eye can see, and what never can be forgotten. Then the personality receives its accolade which knights it for eternity. He does not become another than he was before, but he becomes himself. As an heir, who, though he be heir to all the treasures of the world, does not possess this inheritance before he becomes of age, so the richest person is nothing until he has chosen himself. On the other hand, what might be termed the poorest person is everything when he has chosen himself. For the great thing is not to be this or that, but to be oneself, and this is something which every man can be if he will.”⁵⁷

The Kierkegaardian expression “choosing oneself” is the counterpart to the Greek *γνῶθι σεαυτόν* “know thyself” (the inscription on the temple of Delphi). It signifies that the ethical individual is to know himself not in the sense of mere contemplation, but in the sense of coming to oneself, as an inward action of the personality.⁵⁸ “Choosing oneself” is illustrated in terms of impregnation and birth. Through the individual’s intercourse with himself he is in a sense impregnated and gives birth to himself. The self which the individual knows is the real self, but it is also the ideal self or the pattern according to which he is to mold himself. As a pattern it lies in a sense outside of the individual, yet it is part of him as something which is his possession, his self.⁵⁹

The ethical individual has himself as his task and purpose.⁶⁰ But the self which is his task is not an abstract self but a self which stands in a concrete living interaction with the environment and the social order. The self which it is his purpose to realize is not only a personal but a social and civic self. By entering into and participating in the relationships of life he forms at the same time his own self. Through the interaction of the personal and isolated self and the social order the personality appears in a higher

⁵⁷ *Samlede Værker*, II, pp. 160 f. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, pp. 149 f.

⁵⁸ *Either/Or*, II, p. 216.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

form.⁶¹ According to Judge William the individual is not merely in isolation with the absolute; he is part of a social order. It is his task to become the universal man.⁶² The ethical is the universal. Only when the individual becomes the universal can the ethical be realized. The one who regards life ethically sees the universal, and the one who lives ethically expresses the universal in his life.⁶³ However, one should carefully notice that to the ethicist the universal is not something objective, apart from himself. It is not a set of standards and rules to be observed. The ethical breaks forth from the very depth of his personality.

To Judge William the absolute choice, by which the individual at the same time chooses himself out of the world and chooses himself back into the world with its social relation, has a deep religious significance, for a man is not only responsible to himself and the social order in which he lives, he is responsible to God.⁶⁴ The religious equivalent for the absolute choice is repentance. However, one must be careful not to regard repentance as mediation between the either/or of the absolute choice. Repentance is no Hegelian mediation between good and evil, for it consumes with wrath one of the factors to be mediated. It does not mediate evil, but rather excludes it.⁶⁵

The ethical self which emerges from the absolute choice has a history in which the individual finds himself related to other individuals and to the human race as a whole. But "this history contains something painful, and yet he is the man he is only in consequence of this history. Therefore it requires courage for a man to choose himself, *for at the very time it seems that he isolates himself most thoroughly, he is most thoroughly absorbed in the root by which he is connected with the whole.*"⁶⁶

Since the individual cannot relinquish a single part of his history, not even the most painful, the expression for his struggle is repentance. He repents his way back to the family, to the race, until he finds himself in God.⁶⁷ "And

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 219 f. ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 218. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 218. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181. Italics mine.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

though it were the iniquity of the father which passed by inheritance to the son, he repents of this as well,"⁶⁸ for only by choosing himself as guilty can he choose himself in an absolute sense.

In a beautiful passage Judge William describes the repentance of the son for the guilt of the father: "There will come a moment in his life when his spirit will mature in the moment of choice. Then he will choose himself. Then he will also repent of what guilt of mine may rest upon him. It is beautiful for a son to repent of the mistakes of the father, and yet he would not do so for my sake, but because only by so doing can he choose himself."⁶⁹ Here we find that repentance in a profound sense unites the individual with the whole race.⁷⁰ Judge William has found that every love has its peculiar characteristics, but the love for God has its absolute characteristic, and its expression is repentance.⁷¹ He has only one expression for what he suffers—guilt; one expression for his pain—repentance; and one hope—forgiveness. There is one place where the Judge points to a Pauline conception of Christianity, when he states that the Christian view "places all under sin, something which philosophy, being too aesthetic, had not the moral courage to do."⁷² This statement possibly indicates the ultimate untenability of his position, and that something more is required than human repentance.

The either/or, or the choice of the ethicist, is not something outward or something he has learned; it is immanent in personality itself. "This treasure is deposited in thine own inner self; there is an either/or which makes a man greater than the angels."⁷³ Since this either/or is immanent, it cannot be communicated by one person to another.

Only through an absolute choice can a person enter upon the ethical stage. But by this choice he does not destroy the aesthetic. By choosing himself ethically the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶⁹ *Samlede Værker*, II, p. 195. Translation mine. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, p. 182.

⁷⁰ *Either/Or*, II, p. 201. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁷² *Samlede Værker*, II, p. 215. Cf. *Either/Or*, II, p. 201.

⁷³ *Either/Or*, II, p. 149.

person excludes in an absolute sense the aesthetic, that is, it is dethroned from its sovereignty. But in choosing himself the individual does not become another nature, he remains himself, and the aesthetic is relegated to a "relative" or subordinate position.⁷⁴ The aesthetic undergoes a metamorphosis through which it is purified, and it becomes a contributing factor in the ethical formation of personality.

Judge William speaks of an exception to the ethical. In the most sincere efforts to realize the universal-human in his own individual life a person may meet conditions which entirely prevent such a realization. Such an exception may be due to the God-relationship of the individual. This will be brought out in the next chapter. The exception involves a personal defeat in the realization of what is regarded as the ethically universal; but if at the same time the individual is ennobled by a love for the universal, he will rejoice with those who are able to attain the goal. In his own life there will be a deep sorrow, for he loves the universal and yearns for its realization in his own life. However, through his sorrow he may be reconciled to the universal. Thus the sorrow is resolved into harmony through sublimation.⁷⁵

While the exception strictly speaking applies to certain individuals who cannot realize the universal-human, there is also a sense in which every individual is an exception, "Every man is the universal-human, and at the same time the exception."⁷⁶ By this statement Judge William intimates that every individual lacks the *sine qua non* of fulfilling the ethical demand, for sin applies to all men.

In 1840 at the age of twenty-seven Kierkegaard became engaged to Regina Olsen, an eighteen-year-old Copenhagen girl. She was beautiful, young, and happy, and Kierkegaard with his superior intellect and deep melancholy soon discovered that the engagement was a mistake.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 192, 227.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-277.

He had come to the conclusion that he was both physically and temperamentally unfit for a happy marriage. After a period of intense suffering for both of them, he broke the engagement. However, he never ceased to love Regina; in her absence he loved her still more than in her physical presence. In all of Kierkegaard's major works we find echoes of this experience, and in the end his whole authorship was dedicated to her.

According to Judge William the ethical marriage is based upon openheartedness and sincerity, an openness on the greatest possible scale. Kierkegaard felt that there were things which he could not share with Regina, and to conceal something would have been contrary to his conception of a true marriage. In the year of the publication of *Either/Or* he wrote in his diary. "Had I not honored her more than myself, as my intended wife, had I not been prouder of her honor than of my own, I should have remained silent and fulfilled her desire and my own, and been married to her. There are so many marriages that conceal little tales. That I did not want, for then she would have become my concubine [the love relationship would have been purely romantic and not ethical]. Therefore I would rather have murdered her.— If I should have explained myself I should have initiated her into terrible things, the relationship to my father, his melancholy, the eternal night that broods deep within, my despair, my passions, my going astray, which in God's eyes probably are not so terrible, for after all it was dread which made me go astray, and where should I seek refuge when I knew or suspected that the only man I had admired for his strength and power had wavered."⁷⁷

Another quotation may serve as an illustration of Kierkegaard's sense of being an exception. "I was never like others. Oh, in the days of youth, of all torments the most horrible and most intense: not to be like others, never to live a single day without being painfully reminded that one is not like others, never to be able to run along with

⁷⁷ *Papirer*, IV A 107. Translation mine. Cf. *The Journals*, No. 444.

the crowd, which is the pleasure and joy of youth, never to be able to abandon oneself freely, always as soon as one attempts to do so to be reminded of this chain, the isolation in being a peculiarity which even to despair painfully separates one from all that belongs to human life and cheerfulness, and joy."⁷⁸ This was written toward the very close of his life when melancholy no doubt had magnified the experience of youth.

⁷⁸ *Samlede Værker*, xiv, p. 355. Translation mine.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS STAGE

~~~~~  
Die Christliche Religion ist  
die Religion des Leidens.<sup>1</sup>  
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IN several essays Judge William presented an exposition of the ethical stage. His whole conception of life had a religious foundation or background. He also intimated the possibility of a higher form of life than the ethical. He spoke of experiences so weighted with sorrow that they made the individual an exception to the universal or the ethical, and brought him into a higher sphere of life. He had not himself had such experiences, but he conceded their possibility. This higher form of life is the religious stage. Kierkegaard further develops this idea in such aesthetic works as: I. *Fear and Trembling*; II. *Repetition*; and III. "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" which is the third part of *Stages on Life's Way*. These writings are the principal sources for this chapter.

I

In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard takes a position one step in advance of Judge William. The problem of the book is the collision between the ethical and the religious modes of life or, in other words, between the universal-ethical and the demand of the Absolute, a collision which produces in the individual the sense of a religious "fear and trembling." The pseudonymous author is Johannes *de silentio*, a name which immediately suggests mystification. The main character of the book is Abraham, the Old Testament patriarch. The book moves in the sphere of existence-inwardness rather than in the sphere of speculation.

¹ "The Christian religion is the religion of suffering."—Feuerbach.

Fear and Trembling begins with a series of lyrical meditations and remodelings of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac; then follows a panegyric on Abraham, the knight of faith; finally there are several "Problemata" which arise for the spectator who views the life of Abraham.

God's demand that Abraham should sacrifice his only son brings the knight of faith into a collision between the universal-human and ethical on the one side, and obedience to God's command on the other. Ethically expressed such an act is murder, religiously expressed it is a sacrifice.² Out of this contradiction comes the sense of fear. Abraham's obedience to the command of God is regarded as an act of infinite surrender. At the same time, however, while Abraham made this surrender, he believed that God would give Isaac back to him by restoring him to life. In other words, Abraham's faith was not directed toward a blessing to be gained in the life beyond but to a blessing which was immediate. Furthermore, "he believed by virtue of the absurd; for all human reckoning had long since ceased to function."³ In the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham made the leap of infinite resignation, but he also went further—he reached faith.⁴ The movement of faith is the positive movement by which he regained Isaac.

Johannes *de silentio* also gives a description of the modern man of faith. In every outward appearance the man of faith is like other people. He belongs to the present world, participates in its activities, goes to church on Sundays, and smokes his pipe in the evening. There is not a single cranny through which the infinite is peeping; no token of the infinite betrays him.⁵ "He lives as carefree as a ne'er-do-well, and yet he buys up the acceptable time at the dearest price, for he does not do the least thing except by virtue of the absurd . . . the man has made and every instant is making the movement of infinity. With infinite resignation he has drained the cup of life's sadness, he knows the bliss of the infinite, he senses the pain

² *Fear and Trembling*, p. 38. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 53 ff.

of renouncing *everything*, the dearest thing he possesses in the world, and yet finiteness tastes to him just as good as to one who never knew anything higher. . . . He constantly makes the movements of infinity, but he does this with such correctness and assurance that he constantly gets the finite out of it, and there is not a second when one has the notion of anything else.”⁶ We note that faith and the “infinite resignation” belong to the realm of the inward. They have no outward characterization. Furthermore the finite is not renounced because it is not pleasing. On the contrary the man of faith is as attached to it as any other man. For this reason the break with the temporal is associated with suffering.

According to Kierkegaard the man of faith makes two movements:⁷ first the infinite resignation, then the movement of faith. *The infinite resignation is the break with the temporal.* It is a movement which brings peace and rest, but it does not in itself constitute faith; it precedes faith. Hence, whoever has not made the infinite resignation has not arrived at faith. In the infinite resignation the individual becomes conscious of his eternal validity, and only for the person who possesses such a consciousness can there be a question of grasping existence by means of faith. The infinite resignation is regarded as the last stage prior to faith.⁸

In the infinite resignation the individual resigns the love which is the content of his life (cf. Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac) and reconciles himself to the pain. Then the miracle happens. He makes the further motion; he says, I believe that by virtue of the absurd I shall receive back that which I surrender, for all things are possible to God. The absurd must not be regarded as a factor within the compass of the understanding. It is not identical with the unexpected, the improbable, or the unsurmised. When the man of faith makes the infinite resignation, he is convinced hu-

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Italics mine.

⁷ Following Aristotle, Kierkegaard uses the term “movement” (Greek: *κίνησις*) to denote the change from possibility to actuality.

⁸ *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 65-66.

mainly speaking of the impossibility of any escape. The only salvation is by virtue of the absurd which he seizes by means of faith. He recognizes the impossibility, and at the same time he believes the absurd.⁹ Faith has resignation as its presupposition. It is not an aesthetic emotion, nor an immediate instinct of the heart. It is "the paradox of life and existence."¹⁰

In order to gain a real understanding of Kierkegaard we must keep the distinction between resignation and faith clearly in mind. The distinction is set forth in the following passage. "For the act of resignation faith is not required, for what I gain by resignation is my eternal consciousness. . . . *In resignation I make renunciation of everything*, this movement I make by myself. . . . By faith I make renunciation of nothing, on the contrary, *by faith I acquire everything*. . . . By faith Abraham did not renounce his claim upon Isaac, but by faith he got Isaac."¹¹

The infinite resignation, or the infinite surrender, consists in that the individual severs all ties which bind him to the temporal world. Religiously this may be expressed as "dying to the world." This movement is a negative relationship to life. Through the second movement, that of faith, the individual is again brought back to the temporal (thus Abraham regained Isaac after he surrendered him), but now the individual lives in the temporal or the finite only by virtue of his God-relationship. Faith is a positive relationship to life. Both resignation and faith are movements of passion or pathetic movements.¹² No reflection can bring about these movements. They require a *leap in existence*.¹³ "Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off."¹⁴ Kierkegaard held that in life, or existence, every movement which brings about a real change is a *leap* or an act of freedom.

The ethical as such is the universal and applies to every individual. The ethical task of the individual is to realize

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 68 f. Italics mine.

¹² Cf. p. 60 of this study.

¹³ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 59, note.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

the universal. As soon as an individual asserts himself as an individual over and against the universal, he sins.¹⁵ Hence the first of the "Problemata," "*Is there such a thing as a teleological suspension of the ethical?*"¹⁶ Can the universal maxims of ethics or morality be suspended by the pursuit of some particular end revealed directly by God? In the case of Abraham we find such a suspension, but please note, the ethical is *not abrogated but suspended*. The ethical relationship of Abraham to Isaac is that the father shall love the son more than himself and Abraham is never told that he must cease to love him. In the case of a tragic hero a lower ethical demand may be suspended for a higher as in the case of Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia for the good of the state. Abraham's action, on the other hand, has no relation to the universal. It is purely a private affair and a transgression of the universal. Yet his action is identified with God's will, and the ethical constituted the temptation (*Anfechtung*) which would restrain him from action.¹⁷ In this contradiction lies the *horror religiosus*, the dread and the distress.¹⁸ But when the ethical is suspended as in the case of Abraham, and the individual exists over against the universal, how does he then exist? Abraham believed, i.e., he moved in the sphere of the paradox.¹⁹ He had been confronted with a religious reality superior to all the demands of human ethics. If this were not the case, Abraham's action would be murder. The question is not whether an individual shall act against his conscience (i.e., when he breaks the ethical standards of society) or not, but whether there is an inward value or something that is deeper and more real than all the ethical categories of our cultural life.

As a modern example of a teleological suspension of the ethical Walter Lowrie²⁰ cites the proposal to enact a law

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 79 f. In *Fear and Trembling* the ethical is the ethical in a Hegelian sense.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁰ Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 330.

to sanction the putting to death of a person suffering from a hopeless disease. Even though an individual were justified before God in taking life out of mercy, the universal maxim of ethics is expressed in the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." A mercy killing would thus be a teleological suspension of the ethical.

In *Either/Or*, II, Judge William describes the ethical consciousness with its universal religious background. The individual's God-relationship was of a universal nature; it was never a private relationship. In *Fear and Trembling* Johannes de silentio employs the character of Abraham to present faith as the major human passion which affects the entire life of the individual. Aristotle²¹ recognized the following "passions": anger ὀργή, fear φόβος, courage θράσος, jealousy φθίνος, joy χαρά, friendship φιλία, hatred μίσος, longing πόθος, zeal ζῆλος, sympathy ἔλεος. By passions he meant those states of consciousness which are accompanied by pleasure or pain. Kierkegaard uses the word passion in the Aristotelian sense as intense emotions, and regards faith as the greatest passion of the soul.

Abraham's relationship to God was of a private nature. It was a relationship which dispensed with such universal intermediaries as community, state, humanity, and tradition. Because of his absolute relationship to God the ethical consciousness with its obligation to the universal requirements as expressed in the social and institutional life of man was suspended in favor of a *religious consciousness*. This is what Kierkegaard means when he says that the individual has become higher than the universal: "For faith is this paradox, that the particular is higher than the universal. . . . Faith is precisely this paradox, that the individual as the particular is higher than the universal [i.e., universal ethical maxims], is justified over against it, is not subordinate but superior."²²

²¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, with an English translation by H. Rackham (The Loeb Classical Library, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1939), II, v. 1-2.

²² *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 80-82.

The second of the "Problemata" is: "Is there such a thing as an absolute duty toward God?"²³ According to Johannes *de silentio* the ethical is the universal and as such the divine. Duty as such becomes divine when it is referred to God, and in this sense duty toward the neighbor becomes a duty toward God. This, however, is tantamount to saying that there is no duty toward God, for in exercising one's duty one does not enter into relationship with God but with one's fellow men. If one's relationship to God is determined by one's relationship to men, God becomes an invisible, disappearing point, an impotent thought.²⁴ The paradox of faith, however, is that the individual determines his relationship to the universal by his relationship to God. In the story of Abraham there is such a paradox. Ethically expressed, the father should love the son more than himself. In the case of Abraham this relationship is reduced to a relative position when faced with the absolute relationship to God.²⁵ "His life is like a book placed under a divine attachment, and which never becomes *publici juris*."²⁶ The man of faith is not ignorant of the universal, he knows it as his home and his abiding-place. But he also knows that solitary path which winds outside the universal where there are no fellow-travelers, where because of his absolute relationship to God the man of faith cannot make himself intelligible to others.²⁷ "The distress and dread in this paradox [of faith] is that humanly speaking he is entirely unable to make himself intelligible."²⁸

In the paradox of faith one individual cannot make himself understood by another, even though both be in the very same circumstances. One knight of faith can render no help to the other. In the realm of the paradox no partnership is possible.²⁹ "The knight of faith is obliged to rely upon himself alone, he feels the pain of not being able to make himself intelligible to others, but *he feels* no vain desire to guide others. . . . *The true knight of*

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 102 ff. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

faith is a witness, never a teacher, and therein lies his deep humanity, which is worth a good deal more than this silly participation in others' weal and woe which is honored by the name of sympathy. . . . He who would only be a witness thereby avows that no man, not even the lowliest, needs another man's sympathy . . . he knows that *what is truly great is equally accessible to all.*"⁸⁰

Faith is an absolute relationship which no man can teach another. There is no medium of direct communication. Nevertheless the knight of faith functions as a witness, but in a realm where the truth is *equally accessible to all*. In order to understand this position one should keep clearly in mind that what Kierkegaard designates as faith is not an objective knowledge, but a subjective attitude. The paradox of faith consists precisely in this, that there is an inwardness which is incommensurable with the outward.⁸¹

There is here a marked similarity between the aesthetic and the religious stage. The secrecy which was regarded as harmful in marriage is part of the individual's inner religious life.

Johannes *de silentio* accepts the position of Judge William that the immediate aesthetic personality is concealed, and that the ethical task of the individual is to work himself out of the concealment and reveal himself in the ethical. If he remains concealed, he sins. Hence the third of the "Problemata": Was Abraham ethically justified in concealing his purpose from Sarah, Eleazar, and Isaac?⁸² Or, in other words, is there a concealment which is based on the assumption that the individual as such is above the universal? According to Judge William the ethical requires manifestation. Abraham on the other hand is silent. He could not confide in anyone since the paradoxical demand could not be understood even by his nearest. His concealment was due to the absolute relationship to God. The concealment of *Either/Or* was within the sphere of the aesthetic; the concealment of Abraham is within the sphere

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123. Italics mine.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

of the religious. The distress and the anguish of the paradox consisted in the silence.

Johannes *de silentio* presents several poetic illustrations of the *confinium* or boundary relationship between the aesthetic and the ethical. The main thought in all of these is that a marriage may be rendered impossible by a divine intervention or by the consequences of sin. Under such circumstances a personality is brought into conflicts where the solution of aesthetics may prove deceitful and the solutions of ethics impotent or confusing. Such a personality can only be restored by means of the religious. In *Either/Or* the exception to the ethical could not realize marriage or the universal-ethical, but the deep sorrow could give its testimony to the ethical. In *Fear and Trembling* a way is opened for the realization of the universal, by entering into an absolute relationship with the absolute, i.e., by entering into a deeper relationship with God in inwardness.

Among the poetic examples of Johannes *de silentio* is a reconstruction of the legend of *Agnes and the Merman*.³⁸ The merman ascends from his hiding-place in the deep. In wild lust he seizes a beautiful and innocent girl who is standing on the seashore listening to the howling of the ocean. The merman is a seducer, and by his smooth speech he entices Agnes, who finds in him all that she was seeking. She flings her arms around his neck, and abandons herself to him. The merman is ready to plunge into the sea with his prey. Then Agnes looks upon him once more, not proud of her happiness, nor intoxicated by her pleasure, but with absolute trust in him. In full confidence she yields herself to him. And lo, the roaring of the sea ceases, and nature's passion which is the merman's strength deserts him. He can no longer seduce her. He leads her back again and explains to her that he only wanted to show her how beautiful the sea is when it is calm. She believes him. He can seduce a hundred girls, but Agnes has conquered.

Suppose a human consciousness is attributed to the mer-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 144 ff.; cf. *Papirer*, IV A 113.

man, and suppose the fact of his being a merman is the result of a preexistence in the consequence of which his life is entangled. By means of Agnes the seducer in him has been destroyed. But now two alternatives begin to strive within him: (1) repentance and concealment, and (2) repentance and Agnes. If he chooses repentance and concealment, he cannot marry and he will make Agnes unhappy. If he chooses repentance and Agnes, he is saved—not in the sense that he ceases to be a seducer, for in that respect he is already saved, but in the sense that he becomes revealed. But if he chooses Agnes and with it the necessity of revealing himself, he faces the paradox. The merman cannot belong to Agnes before he has made "the infinite movement of repentance," and having made this, he must make the further movement of faith by virtue of the absurd. By his own strength he may make the movement of repentance, but since this requires all his strength, he cannot by his own strength return and grasp reality.⁸⁴

At this point the following two passages are of paramount importance for a proper understanding of Kierkegaard: "When the individual by his guilt has gone outside the universal he can return to it only by virtue of having come as the individual into an absolute relationship with the absolute. . . . Sin is not the first immediacy,⁸⁵ sin is a later immediacy. By sin the individual is already higher (in the direction of the demoniacal paradox) than the universal, because it is a contradiction on the part of the universal to impose itself upon a man who lacks the *conditio sine qua non*. . . . An ethics which disregards sin is a perfectly idle science; but if it asserts sin, it is *eo ipso* well beyond itself."⁸⁶ In connection with the above quotation is the following footnote: "As soon as sin makes its appearance ethics comes to grief precisely upon repentance; for repentance is the highest ethical expression, but precisely as such it is the deepest ethical self-contradiction."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153; cf. *Papirer*, IV A 113.

⁸⁵ "The first immediacy is the aesthetical." *Fear and Trembling*, p. 125.

⁸⁶ *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 151-152. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152 note.

"The infinite movement of repentance" is another term for the infinite resignation. It implies a complete break with the temporal world. The "return to reality" is the restoration of one's state of innocence. Repentance recognizes the presence of sin, and is a testimony to the fact that the ethical has been broken or violated. By his sin the individual has placed himself beyond the ethical. For him to restore his own innocence is ethically impossible.

In the *Journals* of Kierkegaard are two statements which have a direct bearing upon the relationship of repentance and ethics. They were written the same year *Fear and Trembling* was published: "The highest expression which the ethical view of life offers is: to repent. I am always to repent.— This, however, is precisely the ethical self-contradiction through which the religious paradox breaks forth, i.e., the atonement and its correlative faith. Speaking strictly ethically I must admit that the best I can accomplish is nothing but sin, therefore I am to repent. But then I can never really get to act, since I must repent."⁸⁸ "If by means of repentance one may remain in a loving relationship to God, then it is essentially man himself who does everything [i.e., with respect to his salvation], even though repentance be taken in its extreme sense as suffering. Repentance is no paradox, but where it leaves off, the paradox begins. For this reason he who believes the atonement is greater than the one who repents most deeply."⁸⁹ These two notations indicate that Kierkegaard at this time had arrived at a religious position far beyond that of Judge William in *Either/Or* and Johannes *de silentio* in *Fear and Trembling*. It should also be noted that while Judge William had faintly intimated that every man is the universal as well as the exception, in *Fear and Trembling* the exception has become universal.

According to Johannes *de silentio* there are two religious levels. The first is the universal religious which has to do with *kultur*-values. This represents the religiosity of

⁸⁸ *Papirer*, IV A 112. Translation mine.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, IV A 116. Translation mine.

Judge William. The second level is the religiosity of repentance which arises when the first level of religiosity is broken down by sin. In later notations Kierkegaard indicates that he regards Judge William's method of realizing the ethical restoration by despair alone as impossible. Thus in the *Postscript* Johannes Climacus makes the significant observation: "When I despair, I use myself to despair, and therefore I can indeed by myself despair of everything; but when I do this, I cannot by myself come back. It is in this moment of decision that the individual needs divine assistance."⁴⁰

1. The religiosity of Judge William is according to Kierkegaard a purely ethical experience. God is the universal background to his life, and the Judge accepts his duty as from God. His relationship to God is never a private relationship, but that which is universal to all men. God does in no special sense break into his life.⁴¹

2. In the religiosity of the merman it is suggested that some sin in his past life prevented him from entering into a positive relationship to life. A deeper penetration into the personality is necessary in order to restore the relationship to the absolute. The *infinite double movement* takes place, first the infinite resignation and then the movement of faith. The religious or the absolute is found in an area where the power of understanding ceases.

3. The religious experience of Abraham is different from that of the merman, inasmuch as Abraham is regarded as righteous, i.e., without sin. Hence there is no room for repentance. The break with the ethical (and the ethical is regarded as being in perfect order) is inexplicable to the understanding. Both his reason and his feelings are in conflict with the downward movement of resignation, and his reason is in conflict with the upward movement of faith. The downward movement is the teleological suspension of the ethical. Both movements together are the *infinite double movement*.

⁴⁰ *Postscript*, p. 230. Cf. pp. 162 ff.; also *Papirer*, IV B 49, p. 214.

⁴¹ David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, pp. 131-132.

Why does Kierkegaard so vigorously present the infinite double movement? Geismar has pointed out that it is Kierkegaard's view that all men are by nature idolators in the sense that the passion of the soul is centered in desire. Desire has assumed that absolute reign over personality which God alone should have. Hence the whole of man's presumed ethical existence must be dethroned. Only thus can be established the fear of God as the absolute sovereign and also a true ethical relationship to the temporal. It is from this point of view we must understand the words, "When the individual by his guilt has gone outside the universal he can return to it only by virtue of having come as the individual into an absolute relationship with the absolute."⁴² The personality which has been penetrated by sin—because God is not acknowledged as absolute sovereign—cannot be restored to spiritual health except by the double movement, i.e., by the infinite resignation—by tearing itself loose from everything which prevents God from gaining the sovereignty—and by the movement of faith. "Fear and trembling" is Kierkegaard's expression for the *horror religiosus* which surrounds the sovereignty of God. The *mysterium tremendum et fascinosum* belongs to the God-relationship even apart from sin, as in the case of Abraham.

In the *Journals* is a note which expresses the same thought: "God can only show himself to man in miracles, i.e., as soon as he sees God he sees a miracle. But by himself he is incapable of seeing miracles for the miracle is his own annihilation. The Jews expressed that pictorially by saying that to see God was death. It is truer to say that to see God, or see miracles, happens by virtue of the absurd, for reason must stand alone."⁴³

II

Repetition, published on the same day as *Fear and Trembling*, presents the religious problem from a new side. The teleological suspension of the ethical is here psy-

⁴² E. Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, II, p. 70. ⁴³ *The Journals*, No. 498.

chologically motivated. The pseudonymous author of the book is Constantine Constantius, an aestheticist who seeks to ascertain if the repetition of a previous immediate experience is possible. He concludes: "My discovery was of no importance, and yet it was a strange one, for I discovered that there is no such thing as repetition."⁴⁴ But Constantine's idea of repetition was entirely centered in the outward things, hence it could not take place.

The main character of the book is a young man who is unhappy in love. He is engaged to a young girl whom he loves deeply, but after he has entered into the engagement, he realizes that a marriage will make both of them unhappy. The young girl had been the occasion of awakening his poetic talent. Hence his attachment to her. He could never forget her, never wish to love anyone else. He was forever longing for her.⁴⁵ The trouble with the young man was that he lived in what is termed the "recollection," i.e., his life had a constant reference to the past. He did not believe in the "repetition," and the love of the "recollection" made him unhappy. A psychological peculiarity of some sort motivated the suspension of his ethical duty to marry the girl. He felt that he could not be true to the idea if he married her. The young man is personally convinced that his love cannot express itself in marriage, and that he therefore is justified in breaking the engagement. But should he not have foreseen the consequences? He ponders this question day after day and year after year. "Am I a victim of fate? Must I then be guilty and be a deceiver, whatever I do, even if I do nothing?"⁴⁶ The young man's personality has become split. If he is to recapture his personality, there must be a "repetition" in his life. It is not the question of a repetition in the outward sense, but a repetition within the individual's own personality. The repetition is in this case the restoration of the personality to its integrity.

Constantine suggests to the young man that instead of

⁴⁴ *Repetition*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

informing the girl directly of the impossibility of marriage—something which might only cause her to be still more attached to him and therefore suffer still more—he should make himself appear as a despicable fellow. “Let the rumor be spread abroad that you have a new love affair; of a sort rather unpoetic; for otherwise you will only incite her.”⁴⁷ But the young man lacked the strength of this undertaking. His soul lacked the elasticity of irony. He simply disappeared.

Later it appears that the young man found his refuge in the book of Job. The great merit of Job is that he dared to assert his right before God. Job knows himself to be on good terms with God, he knows himself to be innocent, and he is conscious of the fact that God also knows it, though the whole of existence contradicts him. “By this claim he constituted himself an exception to all human juridical interpretations.”⁴⁸ He confronts the highest tribunal no more daunted than a roaring lion; he knows how to complain aloud so that it echoes in heaven. He is confident that God can explain everything, if only he will speak. For God possesses the thunder, and “that too is an answer, an explanation, reliable, trustworthy, genuine, an answer from God Himself, an answer which even if it crush a man is more glorious than gossip and rumor about the righteousness of providence which are invented by human wisdom and circulated by effeminate creatures and eunuchs.”⁴⁹

The situation into which Job has been placed is called a *trial of probation*,⁵⁰ but this category, “trial of probation” is neither aesthetic, nor ethical, it is a transcendent category. “This category is absolutely transcendent and places a man in a purely personal relationship of contradiction to God, in such a relationship that he cannot rest content with any explanation at second hand.”⁵¹ The “personal relationship of contradiction to God” refers to the fact that Job was conscious of his own innocence before God, yet the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

whole of existence seemed to contradict this consciousness.

Finally God speaks to Job in the thunder. Job is reprobated by God, but when the thunderstorm is passed he is blessed and has received everything double. This is what is called a "repetition."⁵² The young man concludes, "When everything has come to a standstill, when thought is brought to a halt, when speech becomes mute, when the explanation in bewilderment seeks the way home—then there must be a thunderstorm."⁵³ The presentation is of course poetic.

When did the repetition occur in Job's life? At the time when it was regarded as impossible by all 'human certitude and probability, when hope had vanished, and when in the sense of immediacy everything was lost.⁵⁴

The young man of *Repetition* is waiting for an experience similar to that of Job. Says he: "I am expecting a thunderstorm—and repetition. . . . What is this thunderstorm to accomplish? It is to make me capable of being a husband. That will crush my whole personality. . . . It will make me unrecognizable in my own eyes."⁵⁵

Then comes the dramatic conclusion to the story. The young man receives the news that the girl is married to someone else. He is free from the ties that bound him. In his own words: "I am again myself, here I have the repetition, I understand everything, and existence seems to me more beautiful than ever. It came as a thunderstorm after all. . . . Is there not then a repetition? Did I not get everything doubly restored? Did I not get myself again. . . . And what is the repetition of earthly goods . . . in comparison with such a repetition?"⁵⁶ The reader cannot help but ask, "Is this all there was to the thunderstorm?" Precisely so! Constantine Constantius, Kierkegaard's pseudonym, observes that in the case of the young man repetition was aesthetical. At a point he approaches near to the religious stage. "If he had had a deeper religious background, he

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

would not have become a poet. Then everything would have acquired for him a religious significance.”⁵⁷

The whole purpose of the story of the young man is to furnish an existential background for the formulation of the category of repetition. The category is compared with the Greek category of recollection. “*Repetition* is a decisive expression for what ‘recollection’ was for the Greeks. Just as they taught that all knowledge is recollection, so will modern philosophy teach that the whole of life is a repetition. . . . Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards.”⁵⁸

“Recollection” refers to the Greek doctrine that all learning is a form of remembering. Accordingly the Truth (Kierkegaard always thinks in terms of essential truth, i.e., ethico-religious truth) is not something that comes to the individual from without but something which he possesses potentially within himself. The teachers’ task would then be to bring the individual to a consciousness of what he already knows. Socrates developed this thought into a proof for the immortality of the soul or as a proof for the preexistence of the soul. This is what Kierkegaard refers to when he repeatedly emphasizes that the Greeks had their God-relationship secured in the past or in the recollection.

In contrast to the Greek and regressive attitude to the eternal, Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms invented the category of repetition, which is the forward and progressive attitude to the eternal. According to the category of repetition the eternal is a “becoming,” something to be realized and expressed in life. Both the recollection and the repetition have reference to the eternal, but they are movements in opposite directions. At this point we cannot emphasize too carefully that by repetition Kierkegaard does not refer to some future event of an outward nature as in the case of the young man. The real repetition takes place in the individual’s own personality. “The dialectic of repetition is

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

easy; for what is repeated has been, otherwise it could not be repeated, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the character of novelty. When the Greeks said that all knowledge is recollection they affirmed that all that is has been; when one says that life is a repetition one affirms that existence which has been now becomes. When one does not possess the categories of recollection or of repetition the whole of life is resolved into a void and empty noise.”⁶⁰

Repetition is essentially a religious category.⁶⁰ When life has been broken to pieces by sin, and the immediate relationship to God has been destroyed, then repetition is the restoration of the personality to its pristine integrity and the restoration of a new immediate God-relationship. While sin belongs to the realm of ethics, sin is the very concept upon which ethics founders.⁶¹ Where the ethical life is broken down by sin, the problem arises as to whether there be a redemption from sin. Geismar⁶² points out that this is a metaphysical problem since it can only be answered in the affirmative if the cosmic order is redemptive. But according to Geismar and Kierkegaard metaphysics is unable to furnish an answer to the question. Repetition is a religious movement by virtue of the absurd, i.e., by faith. The significance of the category of repetition is expressed in a footnote in *The Concept of Dread*: “Either the whole of existence is to be expressed in the requirements of ethics, or the condition for its fulfillment must be provided—and with that the whole of life and of existence begins afresh, not through an immanent continuity with the foregoing, but by a transcendent fact which separates the repetition from the first existence by such a cleft that it is only a figure of speech to say that the foregoing and the consequent state are related to one another.”⁶³

Repetition is the new birth. It is the answer to the ques-

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34. ⁶⁰ *Papirer*, IV A 169. ⁶¹ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 16.

⁶² Søren Kierkegaard, II, p. 79.

⁶³ *The Concept of Dread*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 16.

tion of Nicodemus, "How can a man be born when he is old?"⁶⁴ According to Geismar⁶⁵ the category of repetition may be summed up in the words: "Repetition is the *interest* of metaphysics, and at the same time the interest upon which metaphysics founders. Repetition is the solution contained in every ethical view, repetition is the *conditio sine qua non* of every dogmatic problem."⁶⁶

The significance of this statement is that it asserts that no Christian education is possible except there first be a transcendent invasion of the human personality and a new immediacy established which is separated from the first (the aesthetic) immediacy by a cleft. The human approach to the religious is, according to the category of the infinite double movement, limited to the negative movement of the infinite resignation. The movement of faith is a transcendent movement. "In this moment of decision it is that the individual needs divine assistance."⁶⁷

III

In the third part of *Stages* Frater Taciturnus (the silent brother) relates how he came upon the diary which he later published under the title "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" Together with a friend, a naturalist who studied marine vegetation, he visited Soeborg Lake. The lake, which is gradually giving way to the mainland, is surrounded by a wide stretch of bog. "Here it is that the *border conflict* is carried on day and night between the lake and the mainland."⁶⁸ The bog is luxuriantly overgrown with rushes, and only a small channel leads through these and to the lake itself. Along this channel the two men punted their way in a flat-bottomed boat.⁶⁹ "Finally we got beyond the reeds, and before us lay the lake, clear as a mirror and sparkling in the radiance of the afternoon. Everything so still! Silence rested

⁶⁴ John 3:4. ⁶⁵ Geismar, *op. cit.* ⁶⁶ *Repetition*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ *Postscript*, p. 230. ⁶⁸ *Stages*, p. 189. Italics mine.

⁶⁹ In order that the reader may gain a first-hand impression of Kierkegaard's intricate literary presentation and of his method of indirect communication of the truth, the author purposely quotes liberally in this chapter.

upon the lake. Whereas while we punted our way through the thicket of rushes, I felt as though I were transported into the midst of the luxuriant fertility of India, now I felt as though I were out upon the Pacific Ocean. I was almost alarmed at being so infinitely far from men, at lying in a nutshell upon a vast ocean. Now there was a confused voice, a mingled cry of all kinds of fowl, and then stillness prevailed again, almost to the point of making me apprehensive when the sound suddenly ceased and the ear *grasped in vain for a support in the infinite.*⁷⁰ The lyrical passage with its reference to the "border conflict" no doubt presages the conflict in the personality of the Quidam of the diary and of his grasping in vain for support in the infinite.

When the naturalist had collected a good deal of material, and while he busied himself with his booty, Frater Taciturnus begged permission to try out the apparatus with which he drew up the submarine plants. He threw it out, and when he wanted to pull it up he found that a heavy weight was attached to it, and only with great effort could he pull it in. To quote his own words: "I had the strangest feeling, and yet I did not have the remotest notion what sort of a find it was I had made. Now when I reflect upon it I know all, I understand it, I understand that it was a sigh from below, a sigh *de profundis*, a sigh that I had wrested from the lake its treasure, a sigh from the shy and secluded lake from which I had wrested its secret. If two minutes earlier I had had a presentiment of this, I would not have ventured to pull."⁷¹ In this passage there is a presage of the profundities and mystery which are encountered in the religious sphere of life.

The heavy object proved to be a rosewood box wrapped in oilskin. The box was locked and when the Frater forced it open the key lay inside. "Thus it is that morbid reserve always is introverted." Within the box was a beautifully written manuscript, a few pieces of jewelry, a flat gold ring with a date inscribed inside it, a diamond cross, a playbill,

⁷⁰ *Stages*, p. 182. Italics mine.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

a page torn from the New Testament, a withered rose, and a few other objects, memories of someone's secret history. The manuscript, which was a diary, reveals the story of unhappy love. The author's name is not given.

After this mystifying introduction we come to the story. A young man becomes engaged to a girl, but the engagement, instead of being the beginning of a life of happiness, ushers in a life of suffering. Every morning the Quidam of the diary writes what happened "Today a year ago," and every midnight what had happened in the course of the day. While the diary itself covers one half of a year, the events embrace a year and a half of the young man's life.

The problem of "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" is poetically stated in the first entry of the diary: "Ought a soldier of the advanced guard to be married? Dare a soldier on the frontier (spiritually understood) take a wife, a soldier on duty at the extremest outpost, who is fighting day and night, not exactly against Turks and Scythians, but against the robber bands of an *innate melancholy*, a soldier of the outpost, who even though he does not fight day and night, though for a considerable period he has peace, yet never can know at what instant the war will begin again, since he cannot even dare to call this quiet a truce."⁷²

The problem of the relationship of Quidam to the girl was a melancholy which in childhood he had received from his father. In an entry called "*The Quiet Despair*" this is poetically described: "There was once a father and a son. A son is like a mirror in which the father beholds himself, and for the son the father too is like a mirror in which he beholds himself in the time to come. However, they rarely regarded one another in this way for their daily intercourse was characterized by the cheerfulness of gay and lively conversation. It happened only a few times that the father came to a stop, stood before the son with a sorrowful countenance, looked at him steadily, and said: 'Poor child, thou art going into'⁷³ a quiet despair.' . . . And the father be-

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 188. Italics mine.

⁷³ The words "going into" would be better translated "walking in a."

lieved that he was to blame for the son's melancholy, and the son believed that he was the occasion of the father's sorrow—but they never exchanged a word on this subject.

"Then the father died, and the son saw much, experienced much, and was tried in manifold temptations; but infinitely inventive as love is, longing and the loss taught him, not indeed to wrest from the silence of eternity a communication, but to imitate the father's voice so perfectly that he was content with the likeness. . . . In loneliness he comforted himself by hearing the father's voice; 'Poor child, thou art going into a [walking in a] quiet despair.' . . . And the father was the only confidant he had had, but *the confidence was of such a sort that it remained the same whether the father lived or died.*"⁷⁴

But the melancholy was not only innate and inherited from the father; it was in a mysterious way connected with a dark spot in the father's life. This is expressed in a poetic entry called "Solomon's Dream."

The young Solomon was brought up in the house of Nathan the prophet. "Then the youth once visited his royal father. He wakes up in the night, hearing a movement in the place where the father sleeps. Terror seizes him. He fears it is a villain who will murder David; he steals closer; he sees David broken-hearted; he hears the cry of despair from the remorseful soul.

"Impotent [from the sight] he seeks again his couch; he falls asleep, but he does not rest; he dreams, he dreams that David is an ungodly man, rejected by God, that the royal majesty is God's wrath upon him, that he wears the purple as a punishment, that he is condemned to rule, condemned to receive the blessing of his people, while the justice of the Lord concealed and secretly passes judgment upon the guilty; and the dream forebodes that God is not the God of the pious but of the ungodly and that one must be ungodly to become the elect of God. In this contradiction lies the terror of the dream.

"As David lay upon the ground with a broken heart,

⁷⁴ *Stages*, p. 192. Italic mine.

Solomon arose from his couch, but his understanding was crushed. Terror seized him as he thought of what it means to be the elect of God. He suspected that the saint's intimacy with God, and the pure man's sincerity before God were not the explanation, but that secret guilt was the mystery which explained all."⁷⁵

The source of the melancholy was a deep piety toward the father brought into conflict with the discovery of the dark secret of his life.

Following the engagement it seemed for a while that the young man had been released from his melancholy. It had yielded to the youthful gladness of the young girl. Then the melancholy returned, and Quidam discovered that it was a part of his nature, a burden of which he could never rid himself. The problem of the diary is: *In view of his reserve what shall be his relationship to the young girl?* He seeks desperately for a way out, and tries one solution after another.

1. *The first possibility of solving the problem:* Due to his superior intellectuality, he could hide the melancholy, and never make her a partner in it. Says he: "My cunning consists in being able to hide my melancholy. As deep as my melancholy is, precisely so cunning is my deception."⁷⁶ With sincere love he yearns to marry the girl, but he will not enfeeble or destroy her by initiating her into his suffering. The first possibility of escape is poetically represented in "A Leper's Soliloquy."⁷⁷ Simon the Leper dwells among the tombs together with Manasseh, a fellow sufferer. Simon has discovered a salve which when applied concealed the outward appearance of leprosy, but did not remove its contagion. One day Manasseh used the salve, returned to the city to live among men, thus exposing them to the danger of the disease. But Simon will not use the salve since it may bring disease to others. He prays to God and says: "I thank thee, God of Abraham, that thou didst grant me to discover the salve; I thank thee that thou didst

⁷⁵ *Samlede Værker*, vi, p. 237. Translation mine. Cf. *Stages*, pp. 236-237.

⁷⁶ *Stages*, p. 188; cf. p. 359. ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

give me strength to forbear the use of it; I understand now thy mercy, and shall willingly bear my fate and freely suffer the inevitable.”⁷⁸ In the diary entry the leprosy takes the place of the melancholy, and the salve replaces Quidam’s ability to conceal the malady under his wit.

The possibility of concealing the melancholy Quidam rejects since this method would be contrary to a true ethical basis for marriage, for “Lovers ought to have no differences between them.”⁷⁹

2. *The second possibility* of a solution that might lead to a realization of the marriage is to initiate the girl into his melancholy so that they unitedly might bear the tragedy of his life. But since he regards the melancholy as a punishment which he receives from the hand of God,⁸⁰ this would, as he sees it, necessitate that they meet in a religious conception of life. So he endeavors to develop her religiously. He reads to her from sermons and religious works,⁸¹ but she appears to have no religious postulates.⁸² She has seen him overwhelmed by the power of religion, but has no eye for the religious.⁸³ There is a difference of language between them,⁸⁴ a yawning disproportion,⁸⁵ for due to his religious disposition and her lack of religious postulates neither understands the other. He is religiously constructed, and religion is his principle of equality. His romanticism is the greatness of infinity, where God is a mighty God, and the whole of earthly existence a period of probation.⁸⁶ She lays claim to religion and talks about it offhand, but in her case God is a good-natured uncle who for fair words does whatever the child wants. She loves a human being, Quidam, more than she loves God,⁸⁷ and in the end she fails to *leap over* into the religious sphere, where the two might have met in an equality of religion.

3. *The third possibility* is that of breaking the engagement. When the young man recognizes the impossibility of

⁷⁸ *Samlede Værker*, VI, p. 221. Translation mine. Cf. *Stages*, p. 221.

⁷⁹ *Stages*, p. 205. ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 214. ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 211, 227, 286.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 214, 223, 286. ⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 222. ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 230. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 224. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

arriving at a mutual religious understanding, he returns to her the ring and breaks off the engagement. To her this is a terrible blow. In her distress she brings him a note composed with the passion of despair. She cannot live without him. She adjures him by God and for the sake of his salvation, by every pious remembrance which binds him, by the holy name of Christ which he so rarely takes upon his lips, because doubt has prevented him from appropriating that name, and just because of this he venerates it more than anything else.⁸⁸ Now he feels himself bound by two powers, the memory of his father and the name of Christ.⁸⁹

4. There is only one possibility left: that of *laboring to set her free*. This is the last stage of the engagement and is the "period of horror."⁹⁰ He changes his outward appearance to that of a scoundrel, a hypocrite, a depraved man, in order to set her free from the fate of what he regarded as an unbearable marriage. His actions are all motivated by his love for the girl. Finally he succeeds in breaking down her love, and the "period of horror" ends in a feeble break.

"Coldly and decisively I announced to her that it was over. She wanted to abandon herself to the most vehement expression of passion, but for the first time in my life I spoke in a tone of command. It is dreadful to take that bold step, but it was the only thing. . . .

"So it is over. If she chooses to cry, I choose the pain; and one grows tired of crying aloud, perhaps she already is; for me the turn of pain will come and come again."⁹¹

Quidam's decision not to enter into marriage relations with the young girl was due to his melancholy and his conception of what constitutes a Christian marriage and a God-relationship. The melancholy made it impossible for him to have a confidant, and that was precisely what the wedding ceremony demanded of him.⁹² The God-relationship was regarded as an absolute which reduced every other relationship to something relative. "What is a wedding? It

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-305. ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 232, 252, 283, 287, 293, 322.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 342.

means taking an oath which is mutually binding. But for a mutual obligation surely mutual understanding is requisite. But she does not understand me. What then is my oath? Nonsense. Is it a wedding? No! It is a profanation. Though we were wedded ten times, I should not be wedded to her, whereas she would be wedded to me.”⁹³

The breaking of the engagement set the young girl free, but it did not settle Quidam’s problem. At the very moment when she was about to forget him, and he had become unimportant to her, she becomes to him more important than ever.⁹⁴ Every year from January to July he lives over again in his own mind the period of engagement. “The period of disquietude is the half year, which returns again and again until I become free.”⁹⁵ Year after year he asks himself the question: guilty?/not guilty? The criminal who is found guilty by the court awaits the sentence of his punishment. Quidam on the other hand awaits the sentence which is to decide if he is guilty or not.⁹⁶ The personality of Quidam is left *in suspense*. He cannot withdraw himself in repentance but gets stuck in a dialectic relationship to reality. He cannot come to the point of repenting, because he cannot determine what he is to repent of. He must wait to be informed by reality what wrong he has actually done.⁹⁷ “When repentance is posited, guilt must be presumed as clear and well ascertained. But the difficulty arises precisely when guilt becomes dialectical.”⁹⁸ Quidam was unable to determine whether he was guilty or not, and this caused in his personality a conflict between repentance and existence.⁹⁹

Quidam’s idea was to construct his life ethically in his inmost being and to conceal the inwardness (melancholy) under the form of deceit. But the engagement with its consequences drove him into the religious sphere.¹⁰⁰ He was forced back to a lonely understanding with God, and in his relationship with men misunderstanding became his for-

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 326. ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 384. ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 202, 240-241, 348. ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 207. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 404-405.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245. ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

eign language.¹⁰¹ The God-relationship became the deeper level in his personality, though he was not at every moment able to maintain his life on that level, as one of the diary entries indicates: "As soon as I am outside my religious understanding I feel as an insect must feel when the children play with it, for existence seems to have acted just as mercilessly with me. As soon as I am within my religious understanding I understand that precisely this has absolute significance for me."¹⁰²

In the diary there is a passage which expresses the crisis of Quidam's religiosity: "My melancholy searches in every direction for the dreadful. Then it grips me with terror. I cannot and will not flee from it, I must endure the thought: then I find a religious composure, and only then am I free and happy as a spirit. Although I have the most enthusiastic apprehension of God's love, I have also an apprehension that He is not a dear old grandpa who sits in heaven and indulges people, but that in time and in temporal existence one must be prepared to suffer everything. *It is my conviction that it is only a Judaizing reminiscence, a petty particularism in Christianity, or habitual cowardice and indolence, to think that one enjoys a special relationship to God and is exempted from such things.* Bustling spiritual and worldly expedients for keeping the terror away are a disgust to me, because these expedients have no understanding of what the terrible is. . . . *He who wills in a religious sense must have a receptive attitude to the terrible,* he must open himself to it, and he has only to take care that it does not stop halfway, but that it leads him into the security of the infinite."¹⁰³

Another entry deals with the communication of God with man, and testifies to the fact that the transcendence of God is not regarded as metaphysical but as *qualitative* in its nature: "In case God himself were a man of some sort, whom one might have outside oneself and talk to and say, 'Let's hear now what you've got to say, and you'll have a chance to see how it strikes me'—in that way one would get

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 335.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 342-343. Italics mine.

off easily. But this is the reason God is stronger than everybody, the strongest of all, that He does not talk that way to a man; the man He would briefly engage in a conversation He takes under custody in such a way that *through the man himself He speaks to the man*. Their conversation is not a *pro* and *contra* as of persons outside of one another, but when God speaks He uses the man himself to whom He speaks, *He speaks to the man by means of the man himself*. Therefore it is He possesses might and can crush a man any moment He will. In case the situation, for instance, were this, that God has spoken once for all, in the Bible, for instance, then, so far from being the mightiest, God would be in the tightest fix, for one can readily dispute such a thing, if one is free to oppose to it one's own opinion. But such an assumption is an airy fancy which has no basis in fact, for God does not speak thus. *He speaks directly to every separate individual, and the instant He speaks to him, He uses the individual himself in order through him to say to him what He would say to him*. Hence it is a weak point in the structure of the Book of Job that God appears in the clouds and also appears as the most accomplished dialectician; for what makes God the terrible dialectician He is, is precisely the fact that one has Him at very much closer quarters, and therewith the softest whisper is more blissful, and the softest whisper is more terrible than seeing him enthroned upon the clouds and hearing Him in the thunder. *Hence one cannot argue dialectically with Him, for all the dialectical power in the soul of the man concerned, God uses against this man.*¹⁰⁴

On the basis of "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" *what are the characteristics of the religious sphere?* The erotic relationship *per se* is of minor importance. Essentially it is used for orientation in the religious sphere.¹⁰⁵ The religious characteristics themselves are as follows:¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292. Italics mine. ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

¹⁰⁶ Koch, Søren Kierkegaard, pp. 74 ff.

1. *Religiosity is not a form of doctrine but a mode of life.* It is a certain way of meeting the problems, the joys, sorrows, and anxieties of life. Quidam does not think disparagingly of doctrine, he presupposes some sort of religious teaching, but religiosity does not consist in a few sentences or paragraphs, but in the condition of the personality. For this reason Kierkegaard does not present a system of religious thought, but a personality in religious existence.

2. *Religiosity is a personal and individual matter.* For the young man the question, "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" becomes a paramount personal concern which must be solved at all cost. He is religiously concerned, because the problem arose from his conception of marriage in relationship to the Christian marriage ceremony.

3. *The religious man cannot make himself immediately understood.* His life possesses a mystery which he cannot submit for intellectual analysis or judgment. That which preoccupied Quidam absolutely was entirely beyond the young girl's understanding. If he had told her, it would have been of no concern to her.¹⁰⁷

4. Since the religious man's actions are dominated by his God-relationship, *he becomes the particular individual*, greater than the universal. His life is a lonely understanding with God.

5. *Religious existence is essentially suffering.* The subtitle to "Guilty?/Not Guilty?"—a "Passion Narrative"—is used pregnantly as a category for the religious, "as if suffering had a decisive significance in connection with the religious." In his "Epistle to the Reader" Frater Taciturnus supports this view with references to Feuerbach¹⁰⁸ and Pascal¹⁰⁹ who both held that suffering was an essential part of the Christian life. "Suffering is posited as something decisive for a religious existence, and precisely as a char-

¹⁰⁷ *Stages*, p. 391.

¹⁰⁸ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1883), p. 111. "Die christliche Religion ist die Religion des Leidens."

¹⁰⁹ *Pensées de Pascal*, quoted in *Stages*, p. 416. "Suffering is the natural state of the Christian, just as health is that of the 'natural' man."

acteristic of the religious inwardness; the more the suffering, the more the religious existence.”¹¹⁰

The contrast between the three stages of existence is characterized in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: aesthetic existence is essentially enjoyment; ethical existence is essentially struggle and victory; religious existence is essentially suffering.

In Quidam’s Diary there are two passages that have specific relationship to religious education: “It is one thing to learn from a textbook exercises to be memorized, one thing to be able to recite the catechism to the parson, or even to the bishop when he makes his visitation, one thing to preachify like a parson—but an entirely different thing is primitiveness in appropriating.”¹¹¹ Religion is here defined not as intellectual knowledge and indoctrination, but as existential appropriation. “Language, arts, handicrafts, one man can teach another, but in an ethico-religious sense one man cannot essentially benefit another. . . . So let the chroniclers tell of kings who introduced Christianity; my notion is this, that a king can introduce a better breed of sheep and railways; but Christianity and spirit (ethically understood) not even an emperor need put himself to the trouble of introducing—that is to say, *in the essential sense*.”¹¹²

The religious experience is unique, and relates itself to the inward, hence there is no direct communication of religiosity from one person to another.

¹¹⁰ *Postscript*, p. 256. ¹¹¹ *Stages*, p. 242.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317. Italics mine.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION OF IMMANENCE AND CHRISTIANITY

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But the difficulty is to become a Christian, because every Christian is such only by being nailed to the paradox of having based his eternal happiness upon something historical.<sup>1</sup>

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IN dealing with the religious stage Kierkegaard does not raise the question of the objective truth of Christianity. The problem is the individual's relationship to Christianity.² Philosophy may offer introductions to Christianity, but these are introductions to a doctrine, not to becoming a Christian.³ The religious problem which faced Kierkegaard is stated in the following words from the *Postscript*:

"I, Johannes Climacus, now thirty years of age, born in Copenhagen, a plain man like the common run of them, have heard tell of a highest good in prospect, which is called an eternal blessedness, and that Christianity will bestow this upon me on condition of adhering to it—*now I ask how I am to become a Christian.*"⁴

The whole problem is subjective; it concerns the individual's "own petty self,"⁵ and has nothing whatever to do with the systematic arrangement of the truths of Christianity in paragraphs.⁶ Kierkegaard's conception of religion is essentially other-worldly. It is related to "an eternal blessedness." Kierkegaard anticipated that the objective investigator would inquire as to the nature of an eternal happiness. "Could you not inform me what an eternal happiness is, briefly, clearly and definitely? Could you not describe it while I shave, as one describes a woman's beauty?"⁷ Such a

¹ *Postscript*, p. 512. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 545. Italics mine. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19. ⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

question can only relegate an "eternal happiness" to the categories of aesthetics, and he has no answer for the aesthetic observer. If one asks, "What can a man gain through the relationship to an eternal happiness," the answer is that in a finite sense there is absolutely nothing to gain but everything to lose. In this life the *expectation* of an eternal happiness is the highest reward.⁸ Such an expectation is a relationship to something future, and a relationship to something future is by its very nature an uncertain relationship.

The basic supposition of Kierkegaard's whole philosophy is: "*In relationship to an eternal 'happiness as the absolute good, pathos is not a matter of words, but of permitting this conception to transform the entire existence of the individual.*"⁹ Geismar¹⁰ points out that he who does not begin with this supposition should never expect to understand the philosophy of Kierkegaard, for this supposition lies at the foundation of his whole work. For an existing individual the concept of an eternal happiness is essentially related to his mode of living.¹¹ If the idea of an eternal happiness does not transform his existence absolutely, if there is anything one is not willing to sacrifice for the sake of an eternal happiness, the relationship is not there.¹²

The religious problem is presented as "pathetic-dialectic." Kierkegaard distinguishes between several varieties of pathos:

*Aesthetic pathos*¹³ expresses itself in words and is disinterested pathos. At the most it indicates that the individual leaves his real self to lose himself in the idea. Whenever an individual abandons himself to lay hold of something great outside him, his enthusiasm is aesthetic.

*Existential pathos*¹⁴ is present whenever the idea is brought into relation with individual existence so as to transform it. If in relating itself to the individual's exist-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 347. Italics mine.

¹⁰ Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, II, p. 88.

¹¹ *Postscript*, p. 347.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 352.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 347, 350.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 347, 386.

ence the absolute *telos* fails to transform it absolutely, the relationship is not one of existential but of aesthetic pathos. Existential pathos is action and a reconstruction of one's mode of existence.

*Ethical pathos*¹⁵ is interested pathos and expresses itself through the active transformation of the individual's entire mode of existence in conformity with the object of his interest. When a person forsakes everything to save himself the enthusiasm is ethical.

*Religious pathos*¹⁶ corresponds to an eternal happiness and is the transformation through which everything in the individual's existence is altered so as to bring it into conformity with the highest good. Hence religious pathos does not consist in hymn-singing but in existing.

Kierkegaard makes a sharp distinction between what he calls Religion A and Religion B, the latter being synonymous with Christianity. Religion A or the religiosity of immanence, which may also be termed the human religiosity, rests upon the supposition that truth is immanent in the human subjectivity,¹⁷ and that the moral and religious life can be brought to a normalcy by means of an inner effort or concentration of the personality.¹⁸ God is regarded as immanent in the human personality.¹⁹ Religion B, or the more specifically Christian religiosity rests upon the supposition that the human subjectivity is the untruth,²⁰ that the most intense inward concentration of the personality can only result in a consciousness of an absolute distance from God, and that the personality can be restored to soundness only through a revelation of God in history.²¹ Religion A has a plus at the foundation of human nature, while Religion B has a minus.

In our discussion we shall first consider the task of the religiously existing individual and the three criteria of religious experience: resignation, suffering, and guilt. All

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 348, 349.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 184.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 509.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 494, 498.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 498; cf. *Papirer*, v B 3:2.

of this comes under the category of what Kierkegaard terms religion A or the human religiosity.

The task of the religiously existing individual Kierkegaard explains in the following words: "The task is to exercise the absolute relationship to the absolute *telos*, striving to reach the maximum of maintaining simultaneously a relationship to the absolute *telos* and to relative ends, not by mediating them, but by making the relationship to the absolute *telos* absolute, and the relationship to the relative ends relative. The relative relationship belongs to the world, the absolute relationship to the individual himself."²²

There are, according to Kierkegaard, only two goals in human life. The one is the goal of eternity, and is spoken of as God or an eternal happiness. This is the goal which man *ought* to attain. The other is the goal of temporal existence. This is the goal which man desires to attain. These two goals are held to be contrary to one another.²³ It is characteristic of the philosophy of Kierkegaard that the absolute goal is not defined according to its nature, but always according to the manner in which it is possessed. It is the pathos of the relationship to an eternal happiness which matters. The pathos of the problem is always to express the relationship to an eternal happiness, in the medium of existence. It is not a question of "testifying about an eternal happiness" but of "transforming one's existence into a testimony concerning it."²⁴

Kierkegaard fully recognizes that we are living in a world of social and economic ends which are essential to our temporal existence, but he constantly emphasizes that the absolute *telos* does not become concrete in the relative tasks of life. The absolute *telos* refuses at every moment to fraternize with the relative *telos*.²⁵

²² *Postscript*, pp. 364 f.

²³ *Christian Discourses* and *The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air* and *Three Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, translated by Walter Lowrie. London: Oxford University Press. 1940. Page 156.

²⁴ *Postscript*, p. 353. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

Kierkegaard points to three criteria of religious experience: resignation, suffering, and guilt.

As soon as a man sets out to transform his life in conformity with the absolute *telos*, he discovers something pathological in his own nature, namely that he is absolutely committed to relative ends. The first genuine expression for the relationship to the absolute *telos* is therefore a total renunciation or surrender by which the individual severs the ties which bind him to the temporal world.²⁶ "When it is said, 'Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God,' the goal of eternity is thereby posited as that for which man shall strive. If this is to be done, and done according to the letter . . . it is required above all that man seek not *first* something else. But what is this 'something else' which he seeks? It is the temporal. If then he is to seek first God's kingdom, he must freely renounce every temporal goal."²⁷

When a man in the great moment of resignation has acquired the absolute direction toward the absolute *telos* everything is changed, and it becomes his task existentially to express that he constantly maintains the absolute direction. He does not cease to be a human being; he still lives in the finite with all the predicates of ordinary human existence. He possesses the finite as one who is clothed in borrowed garments. His roots have been severed from the soil of the finite. While the religious individual endeavors to maintain the absolute relation, "resignation will make its inspection early and late to see how he preserves the lofty solemnity with which he first acquired the absolute direction to the absolute *telos*."²⁸ Such an individual may be a king, but whenever he holds the scepter in his outstretched hand, resignation is immediately there to see if he expresses existentially the absolute respect for the absolute *telos*, and the glory of the royal crown fades, though he wears it royally.²⁹

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 362, 386, 433.

²⁸ *Postscript*, pp. 367 and 364.

²⁷ *Christian Discourses*, p. 159.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

Resignation is according to Kierkegaard the initial expression of existential pathos.

According to Kierkegaard religious action is only such action as transforms the inner existence of the individual.³⁰ Except the individual is changed and steadily continues to be changed—and remember the change is to be in inwardness, that is, in the inner life of the personality—the action is not regarded as religious.³¹ Furthermore all action in inwardness is regarded as suffering, for the individual “cannot make himself over.” Thus suffering becomes the highest act of inwardness and the essential criterion of the religious life.³²

Religious suffering must not be confused with physical ailments or self-torture. The significance of the suffering is that it is “soul-suffering,”³³ it belongs to the inwardness of the personality and must not express itself outwardly as for instance in the monastic movement.³⁴ An apostle or a martyr may endure extreme physical sufferings because of his faith, but such suffering belongs to the outward and physical. It is not inward suffering or “soul-suffering.”

The religious suffering “has its ground in the fact that the individual is in his immediacy absolutely committed to relative ends.”³⁵ By nature the individual is regarded as rooted in the immediate, and in reality he is absolutely committed to relative ends. “The religious individual lies fettered in the finite with the absolute conception of God present to him in human frailty.”³⁶ Therefore his absolute relationship to God must begin by a renunciation of the relative, that is, of everything which binds him to his temporal existence.³⁷ The conception of God or an eternal happiness is to transform the individual’s entire existence. This transformation is religiously described as a dying away from the world or from the immediate.³⁸

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Training in Christianity*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), p. 136.

³⁴ *Postscript*, p. 446.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 386, 433.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 412, 414, 446.

"What the conception of God or an eternal happiness is to effect in the individual is, that he transforms his entire existence in relation thereto, and this transformation is a process of dying away from the immediate. This is slowly brought about, but finally he will feel himself confined within the absolute conception of God; for the absolute conception of God does not consist in having such a conception *en passant*, but consists in having the absolute conception at every moment. This is the check on his immediacy, the death verdict which announces its annihilation."³⁹ This dying away from the immediate is religious suffering.

The religious suffering is also due to the fact that the religious individual is separated from his eternal happiness. An eternal happiness is not something which he can lay hold of in time; on the other hand it has a reference to the future. The religious individual has not as yet arrived at his happiness.⁴⁰ The suffering signifies that he sustains a relationship to an eternal happiness. Suffering is the very expression of the God-relationship.⁴¹

Another cause of the suffering is found in the fact that the religious individual cannot find a decisive external expression for his God-relationship. "Between God and man, however, there exists an absolute difference. . . . But since there is this absolute difference between God and man, how does the principle of equality in love express itself? By means of the absolute difference. And what is the form of this absolute difference? Humility. What sort of humility? The humility that frankly admits its lowliness with humble cheerfulness before God. . . . *Herein lies the profound suffering of true religiosity, the deepest thinkable, namely to stand related to God in an absolute decisive manner, and to be unable to find any decisive external expression for this.*"⁴²

In the religious suffering immediacy expires and religiosity comes to life; "in suffering religiosity begins to

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 432. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 405, 406. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 405, 407.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 439 f. Italics mine.

breathe.”⁴³ This suffering is not temporary but persistent.⁴⁴ The absence of suffering signifies the absence of religious life.⁴⁵ “When the Scriptures say that God dwells in a contrite heart, this does not represent a transitory or momentary relationship, but expresses on the contrary the essential significance of suffering for the God-relationship.”⁴⁶ *Suffering, then, is regarded as the essential criterion of religious life.*

As the individual approached the task of maintaining an absolute relationship to God and a relative relationship to the immediate and temporal, he discovered that life had a wrong direction, and that he had to approach his absolute relationship to God via the “immense detour” of dying away from immediacy. Out of the individual’s inability to maintain the absolute relationship to which his life is committed rises the consciousness of guilt.⁴⁷ *Guilt is the decisive criterion of religiosity.*

The guilt of the individual is not determined empirically or as a *summa summarum*, but as a totality. By placing guilt in relation to God and an eternal happiness the definition of guilt receives a qualitative determinant.⁴⁸ The consciousness of guilt disrupts the individual’s God-relationship and places him as remote from deity as possible. Yet, at the same time it is the consciousness of God which supports the religious suffering and the consciousness of guilt. Because of the consciousness of guilt the individual is unable properly to lay hold of his God-relationship. The God-relationship is being constantly annulled.⁴⁹

In the consciousness of guilt the individual’s guilt is regarded as a disturbance within the personality itself. The guilt does not involve a complete break in the individual’s God-relationship. Since the eternal embraces the individual on every side a complete break cannot occur between the existing individual and the eternal. The consciousness

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 389, 469.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 391, 406.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 471-472.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

of guilt is therefore a "disrelationship" within the sphere of immanence.⁵⁰

The religiosity which has been described up to this point Kierkegaard designates as religion A. It is the religiosity of immanence in which subjectivity, or inwardness, has been posited as the truth.⁵¹ Religion A is the dialectic of inward transformation. It represents a relationship to an eternal happiness which is not conditioned by anything outside the individual.⁵² With respect to religion A it makes no difference whether the six thousand years of history be true or not for the individual reposes in the consciousness of eternity.⁵³ Says Kierkegaard: "In the religion of immanence the individual does not base his relationship to the eternal upon his [the individual's] existence in time, but the individual's relation to the eternal, by the dialectic of inward appropriation, determines him in transforming his existence in accordance with this relation and expresses the relation by the transformation."⁵⁴ In other words, one does not base one's eternal happiness upon one's existence, but the relationship to an eternal happiness becomes a determinant for the transformation of one's existence. Religion A assumes that every man, as he is viewed essentially, has a share in this blessedness and finally becomes blessed.⁵⁵ Since the eternal is regarded as being everywhere, and since it is immanent in all men, there is in religion A a fellow-feeling for all men.⁵⁶

The Christian religiosity or religion B posits the very opposite of the human religiosity or religion A, namely that "subjectivity is the untruth," and that the Eternal Truth has come into being in time through the incarnation of God in Christ.⁵⁷ This idea, that God or the eternal

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 474, 505. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185. ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 494.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 512. In the large section of the *Postscript* translated by David F. Swenson the term "religiosity" is used. In the section translated by Walter Lowrie the term "religiousness" is used.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 509. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 515. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 518, 456.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 185, 187.

is at a definite moment of time is an indication "that existence is abandoned by the concealed immanence of the eternal."⁵⁸ In religion A the eternal is concealed in the actuality of existence: in Christianity the eternal is at a definite place and at a definite time in history. The incarnation of God in time is a breach with immanence.⁵⁹

According to Christianity that which is eternal, and by its very nature cannot be historical, came into existence in time, was born, lived, and died. This is regarded as the absurd and constitutes a break with all thinking.⁶⁰ The absurd is not irrationality; it is due to the discontinuity which exists between God and man.

Christianity is something historical, and the greatest attainable certainty with respect to anything historical is at best an approximation. Yet Christianity proposes precisely by means of the historical to be of decisive significance for a man's eternal happiness.⁶¹ The paradoxical lies in that "an approximation is essentially incommensurable with an infinite personal interest in an eternal happiness."⁶²

Christianity makes existence paradoxical and remains paradoxical as long as one exists. It is not an evolution within the total definition of human nature, or a paradox which later through a higher knowledge resolves itself in an explanation. Only eternity possesses the explanation. "The martyrdom of faith (crucifixion of the understanding) is not a martyrdom of the instant, but precisely the martyrdom of endurance."⁶³ This, however, does not imply that the Christian believer has a low regard for the understanding.⁶⁴ He possesses and uses his understanding in intercourse with other men, but does not attribute it to a lack of understanding if somebody is not a Christian, for with respect to religion he believes against the understanding.⁶⁵

Religion B, or Christianity, is the paradoxical religiosity,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 506. ⁵⁹ *Loc. cit.* ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 516.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 509, 513. ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 26. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 501. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 503, 504. Cf. pp. 501 and 505.

or "the religiousness which has its dialectic in the second instance."⁶⁶ In religion A an eternal happiness is something simple, and the pathos is that of inward appropriation while in religion B the eternal happiness itself is conditioned upon a relationship to the absurd, "a repellent to produce new pathos."⁶⁷

Religion A is universal. It knows the whole race as saved. Religion B is particularistic. The eternal happiness of each individual depends upon his relationship to a historical fact which requires time to be made known, and everyone who does not bind himself to this condition is *eo ipso* excluded.⁶⁸

Sin-consciousness, as distinguished from the guilt-consciousness of religion A, represents the breach with immanence, for by coming into being the individual has become another. Sin as such is not placed within immanence. From eternity the individual is not a sinner, but when the individual who is planned on the scale of eternity comes into the world, he becomes a sinner, and is thereby excluded from every communication with the eternal by means of immanence.⁶⁹ Sin therefore is not a dogma or a doctrine, but the new *existence medium*.⁷⁰

The consciousness of sin is peculiarly tied up with the unique characteristic of Christianity as a revelation *sensu strictissimo*.⁷¹ "The individual is unable to acquire sin-consciousness by himself as he can guilt-consciousness; for in guilt-consciousness the identity of the subject with himself is preserved, and guilt-consciousness is an alteration of the subject *within himself*; sin-consciousness is an alteration of the very subject *himself*."⁷²

The restoration of the union between God and man is brought about by a descent of the deity. It is the descent of the deity and the incarnation of the deity in the personality of a single individual which constitutes the paradox.⁷³

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 494. ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 494. Cf. p. 497, and *Papirer* V B 3:2.

⁶⁸ *Postscript*, pp. 516, 518. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 517. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 517, 518.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191. ⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 517. Italics mine.

⁷³ *Philosophical Fragments*, translated by David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), p. 36; *Papirer*, IV A 47, 103.

According to Kierkegaard religion A can exist in paganism as well as in "Christianity." It is the religiosity of everyone who is not decisively a Christian.⁷⁴ It is also essential that religion A be present in the individual before there can be the presence of religion B. Only when the individual is related to an eternal happiness by the most decisive existential pathos can there be a question of becoming a Christian.⁷⁵

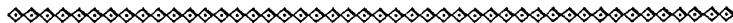
In the *Unscientific Postscript* is an interesting note concerning the edifying factor in religion:⁷⁶ (1) In the aesthetic sphere the resting place of edification is outside the individual who accordingly seeks the place. (2) In religion A the edifying element is within the sphere of immanence, and is the annihilation by which the individual puts himself out of the way in order to find God. The place of edification is the individual himself, for in immanence God is not outside the individual, and the most edifying factor is the totality of the guilt-consciousness. (3) In religion B the edifying is again outside the individual for the individual does not find edification by finding the God-relationship within himself. The paradox consists in that this apparently aesthetic relationship (the individual being related to something outside himself) is the right relationship. The edifying factor is the determination of God in time as an *individual man*.

⁷⁴ *Postscript*, p. 495. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 497-498. By edification Kierkegaard does not refer to a contemplating attitude but to the actual rebuilding of the personality.

CHAPTER VI

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP OF THE STAGES



There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. The metaphysical is abstraction, there is no man who exists metaphysically.¹



In the previous chapters there is a sharp delineation between the three existence-spheres as well as between religion A and the distinctly Christian religiosity. With this background it is now appropriate to seek a solution to the following questions: What is the interrelationship of the stages? What norm has been applied in their arrangement? And what is the nature of the transition from one stage to another?

The use of the term "stages"² is particularly due to the title of the book, *Stages on Life's Way*. Kierkegaard also uses the term "view of life"³ as the equivalent to the German *Lebensanschauung*. In one place he uses the term "existence-categories,"⁴ but the main designation, especially in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is "existence-spheres."⁵

The three spheres are repeatedly defined in their relationship to each other: "There are three existence-spheres: the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. The metaphysical is abstraction, there is no man who exists metaphysically.

¹ *Stages*, p. 430.

² *Ibid.*, p. 394; *Postscript*, pp. 261, 262, 264, 265, 307, 325, 459, 463.

³ *Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life*: Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions, translated by David F. Swenson (Minneapolis: The Augsburg Publishing House, 1941), p. 110. Also *Stages*, pp. 170, 280, 282, 394. And *Postscript*, pp. 153, 315, 386, 388, 393.

⁴ *Postscript*, p. 320.

⁵ *Stages*, p. 430; *Postscript*, pp. 136, 144, 377, 385, 387, 400, 448, 474, 475, 498, 499, 513.

The metaphysical, ontology, *is* but does not exist; for when it exists it is in the aesthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it *is* it is the abstraction of or the *prius* for the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. *The ethical sphere is only a transitional sphere*,⁶ and hence its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The aesthetic sphere is that of immediacy, the ethical is that of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious sphere is that of fulfillment, but note, not such a fulfillment as when one fills a cane or a bag with gold, for repentance has made infinite room, and hence the religious contradiction: at the same time to be upon seventy thousand fathoms of water and yet be joyful.”⁷

And again: “If the individual is in himself undialectical and has his dialectic outside himself, then we have the *aesthetic interpretation*. If the individual is dialectical in himself inwardly in self-assertion . . . we have the *ethical interpretation*. If the individual is inwardly defined by self-annihilation before God, then we have *religiousness A*. If the individual is paradoxically dialectic, every vestige of original immanence being annihilated and all connection cut off, the individual being brought to the utmost verge of existence, then we have the paradoxical religiousness. . . . *Immediacy, the aesthetic*, finds no contradiction in the fact of existing. . . . *The ethical* finds the contradiction, but within self-assertion. *The religiousness A* comprehends the contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, although within immanence. . . . *The paradoxical religiousness* breaks with immanence and makes the fact of existing the absolute contradiction, not within immanence, but against immanence.”⁸

The aesthetic existence is further defined as essentially enjoyment, ethical existence as essentially struggle and victory, religious existence as essentially suffering.⁹

Besides the three existence-spheres Kierkegaard recognized two boundary zones,¹⁰ “irony” as the *confinium* be-

⁶ Italics mine. ⁷ *Stages*, p. 430. ⁸ *Postscript*, p. 507.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 448, 473 note.

tween the aesthetic and the ethical, and "humor" as the *confinium* between the ethical and the religious.

*Irony*¹¹ is a form of speech in which the real meaning is concealed by the words used. The word "irony" comes from the Greek *εἰρωνεία*, which means dissimulation of speech. The Greek word was used for an understatement. Greek irony is especially exemplified in the assumed ignorance of Socrates, especially in his relationship with the Sophists. Socrates was an *ἀρπάνιος*, a dissembler of speech. The Socratic dialectic with its assumed ignorance forms the background for the whole concept of irony. According to Webster's Dictionary, "The distinguishing quality of irony is that the meaning intended is contrary to that seemingly expressed."

From early youth Kierkegaard was interested in the concept of irony;¹² his master's thesis dealt with "*The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*." According to Kierkegaard, Socrates was not only a master of irony, but his whole point of view, his view of life was irony *sensu eminentiori*. Such an irony is not merely a form of speech as "when an author congratulates himself upon succeeding in expressing himself ironically."¹³ "Essential irony" is a determinant of personality and individuality. Kierkegaard further maintains that the Socratic irony was directed against the entire civilization or existence of his day. For the ironical person the given reality has entirely lost its validity; it has become an imperfect and embarrassing form. On the other hand the ironist does not possess the new formation which is to be established, for irony does not establish anything or bring anything new into existence.¹⁴ In his master's thesis Kierkegaard defines irony in the following words: "*Ironia, ut infinita et absoluta negativitas, est levissima et maxime exigua subjectivitatis significatio.*"¹⁵

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 448-451.

¹² *Papirer*, I A 75, 154, 239; II A 96.

¹³ *Postscript*, p. 450.

¹⁴ *Samlede Værker*, XIII, p. 334.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 100. "Irony, as the infinite and absolute negativity, is the faintest and most evanescent indication of subjectivity."

As an intermediary existence-sphere irony is a contemplative attitude, a "culture of the spirit"¹⁶ which has the ethical as its object, while it is polemical in its attitude toward the aesthetic life. The ironist comprehends the ethical as a *possibility* of a higher form of life, while in *actuality* he has not entered into the ethical categories. He has emancipated himself from the obedience to the aesthetic life, but not entered into allegiance with the ethical. For the life of the personality irony has a significance similar to that of doubt for the scientist.

The word "humor" originally meant moisture. In old physiology it was used of the bodily fluids, *humores in corpore*, which were conceived as determinants of a person's health and temperament. Thus the word "humor" came to be used in the sense of "temperament," "disposition," and "mood." Humor is further used of the ability to discover, express, or appreciate the ludicrous and incongruous in given situations.

In German Romanticism, which borrowed the word from the English, humor is "*diejenige Komik, deren Vater der Schmertz ist,*" and "*der Scherz, der auf Ernst gegründet ist.*"¹⁷ This type of humor springs out of a particular attitude to life. The humorist does not lament the evil in the world, nor does he ridicule it; he laughs at it, but with a sense of pain. He comprehends the moral, physical, and intellectual evils as a totality to which he himself belongs. While he does not ignore the moral conflict in human life, he has the consciousness that the cosmic life, of which he is part, possesses spiritual powers which are victorious over evil.

While humor,¹⁸ according to Kierkegaard, is not essentially different from irony, it is essentially different from Christianity. The humorist has discovered the moral con-

¹⁶ Postscript, p. 450.

¹⁷ Kirchner-Michaëlis, *Wörterbuch der Philosophischen Grundbegriffe*, fünfte Auflage. Leipzig: Verlag der Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, 1907. P. 267. "That comic which has pain as its father" and "the jest which is based upon seriousness."

¹⁸ Postscript, pp. 242-243, 258-259, 451-457, 489-493.

flict in his own personality. He comprehends guilt as a totality, but he does not maintain a relationship to God in terms of religious passion.¹⁹ "When humor uses the Christian terminology (sin, the forgiveness of sin, atonement, God in time, etc.) it is not Christianity, but a pagan speculation which has acquired a *knowledge* of the Christian ideas. It can come deceptively close to the Christian position; but where decisiveness takes hold; where existence captures the existing individual so that he must remain in existence, while the bridge of immanence and recollection is burned behind him; where the decision comes to be in the moment, and the movement is forward toward a relationship with the eternal truth which came into being in time: there humor does not follow."²⁰

Like the ironist, the humorist assumes a passive attitude of contemplation. He has "apparently assimilated the entire Christian position, but without having appropriated it in a decisive manner."²¹ He lacks that qualitative decisiveness which Kierkegaard regards as essential to the Christian position. However, humor is "the last stage of existential inwardness before faith,"²² and "the last *terminus a quo* in connection with the problem of determining the Christian."²³

In the case of humor as an intermediate stage we immediately face a difficulty, for there are actually two transitions; first, from the ethical to religion A, then from religion A to the paradoxical religiosity. Kierkegaard does not make clear to which transition humor belongs. In one case he says, "Humor is not yet religiosity, but lies on the boundary,"²⁴ and in another case, humor is "the last *terminus a quo* in relation to the Christian type of the religious."²⁵ Two interpretations seem possible: (1) Kierkegaard may have regarded humor as a *confinium* prior to religion A as well as prior to Christianity, but this does not seem likely since he only speaks of one intermediary stage between the

¹⁹ *Postscript*, pp. 242, 451, 492. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243. ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 259. ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 243. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 447; cf. pp. 489, 492.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258; cf. p. 259.

ethical and the religious.²⁶ (2) Since the religious stage does not culminate in religion A but in Christianity, it is possible that Kierkegaard used humor in a limited sense as an intermediary prior to religion A, but that in a larger sense he regarded all of religion A within the category of humor. Humor is definitely considered a transition zone prior to Christianity.²⁷

The three spheres of existence advance from the aesthetic to the religious with its culmination in Christianity. Are these spheres to be regarded as a curriculum which a person has to pass through in order to become a Christian? In a certain sense this may be answered in the affirmative, provided one does not assume that one has to pass through every variety of experience described within the compass of each sphere. "There are many ways which all lead to the one truth, and each man walks his own way."²⁸

Kierkegaard's first work *Either/Or* represents two great alternatives, the choice of either the aesthetic mode of life or the ethical mode of life. Does he imply that the "either/or" is successively moved forward so that it finally stands between religion A and Christian religiosity? A progression from the lower to the higher sphere would then imply that each sphere had been successively discarded as radically false, and this would in the end completely wipe out all experience of ethico-religious idealism from the Christian consciousness.²⁹ This is a common interpretation of Kierkegaard in Germany. Emmanuel Hirsch, the German Kierkegaard scholar, writes: "The manner in which we in Germany usually understand the *Postscript* is roughly as follows:³⁰ It describes the ethical and the religious solely for the purpose of distinguishing these from the Christian religiosity as being non-Christian and without faith in the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 448. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 243, 259. ²⁸ *Crucial Situations*, p. 38.

²⁹ Eduard Geismar, *Lectures on the Religious Thought of Søren Kierkegaard*. Introduction by David F. Swenson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937. On p. 58.

³⁰ The reference is no doubt to the Neo-supernaturalism of the Barthian School.

paradox. This interpretation deserves the gold medal in a competition to see who could say the greatest stupidity about Kierkegaard. The *Postscript* intends to make clear that everything Christian which does not possess the unconditionality of the ethical and the depth of religious suffering and religious guilt [characteristics of Religion A] is illegitimate religious aestheticism, a paganism in Christian disguise.”³¹

In connection with the absolute choice which brings a person from the aesthetic stage into the ethical stage Kierkegaard speaks of the aesthetic as being *dethroned* from its dominating position in the personality, yet remaining in its relativity and transformed by the ethical.³² On the other hand, he never spoke of the ethical as being dethroned by the religious. “The ethical is the absolute and in all eternity the highest.”³³ The ethical is the highest task for every human being.³⁴ The ethical requirement is for every individual.³⁵ The ethical is an expression for the God-relationship.³⁶ The ethical is regarded as a transition sphere between the aesthetic and the religious stages.³⁷ The religious sphere lies so close to the ethical that there is a constant communication between the two.³⁸ Hence Kierkegaard speaks about the “ethico-religious.”³⁹ The religious sphere possesses the ethical,⁴⁰ and a person must have passed through the ethical in order to arrive at the religious stage.⁴¹ There is, therefore, no conflict between the ethical and the religious.

With regard to the relationship of religion A and Christianity Kierkegaard definitely states that every Christian possesses the pathos of religion A,⁴² and that religion A must be present before one can become aware of the dialectic of religion B.⁴³

Christianity, such as Kierkegaard conceived it, does not

³¹ Emmanuel Hirsch, *Kierkegaard-Studien* (3 volumes. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1938), II, pp. 802-805. Translation mine.

³² *Either/Or*, II, p. 150. ³³ *Postscript*, p. 133. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 284. ³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123, 128. ³⁷ *Stages*, p. 430.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 144. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 387, 417, 430. ⁴⁰ *Papirer VII B* 235, p. 20.

⁴¹ *Postscript*, p. 347. ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 516. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

exist apart from religion A, the religion of immanence. Furthermore, there is no either/or separating religion A and Christianity.⁴⁴ It must also be kept in mind that Kierkegaard deals with religiosity and not with objective religion, and that the pathos of religion A which is to be carried over into Christianity consists (1) in maintaining simultaneously an absolute relationship to the absolute *telos* and a relative relationship to relative ends, (2) in suffering, and (3) in the sense of guilt. The ethical sphere is so closely related to the religious that it is regarded as a transition stage prior to the religious sphere. The ethical is absolute and eternal and exists within the religious sphere. At the same time religion A and Christianity are so closely related that Christianity does not exist apart from the pathos of religion A.

Kierkegaard presents only one great choice: *Either* the aesthetic mode of life, whether it be life of pleasure, despair, or religious and metaphysical contemplation, *or* the ethical mode of life comprehended within the religiosity of immanence and culminating in Christianity.⁴⁵

Support for this interpretation is found in an exposition of *Stages on Life's Way* in the *Postscript*: "There are three stages: an aesthetic, an ethical and a religious. . . . But in spite of this triple division the book is nevertheless an either-or. The ethical and the religious stages have in fact an essential relationship to one another."⁴⁶ And again, a note in Kierkegaard's papers reads: "Three stages and yet one either/or."⁴⁷ Kierkegaard's position should therefore be regarded as both human and Christian.

The different existence-spheres of Kierkegaard are arranged on a scale of values beginning with aesthetic immediacy and culminating in Christianity as paradoxically understood. What norm did Kierkegaard apply to this arrangement? Apparently he never discussed the norm

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 346, 384, 493.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 805; Walter Lowrie's introduction to *Postscript*, p. xix; Geismar, *Lectures*, pp. 58-59.

⁴⁶ *Postscript*, p. 261. ⁴⁷ *Papirer*, VI B 41, 10.

in relationship to the stages. However, his indictment of the contemporary age was that it had forgotten what it means to exist and what inwardness or subjectivity signified.⁴⁸ Kierkegaard posits subjectivity or inwardness as the highest ethical truth,⁴⁹ and by the term he meant the personal relationship of the existing individual.⁵⁰ Hence he was not interested in objective religion, but in religiosity, not in an ethical system but in the ethical action of the individual. The highest task of any individual is regarded as that of becoming subjective.⁵¹ A statement in the *Postscript* seems to indicate that there is a norm used in the arrangement of the stages: "All interpretations of existence [as represented in the stages] are arranged according to a scale of values based on the degree of dialectical inwardness appropriated by the individual concerned."⁵² If the individual is undialectical in himself and has his dialectic outside himself, we have a representation of the aesthetic stage. If the individual is dialectical in himself inwardly in self-assertion, we have a representation of the ethical mode of life. If the individual is dialectical inwardly in self-annihilation before God, we have a representation of religion A. If the individual is paradoxically dialectic with every vestige of the original immanence destroyed, we have a representation of paradoxical religion or Christianity.⁵³

The aesthetic stage is the lowest in the scale of values. It is polemical against life and lacking in dialectical inwardness. The ethical stage is superior to the aesthetic, for the ethical is both universal and immanent and as such constitutes the highest task for every human being.⁵⁴ But Kierkegaard never thought of stopping at the ethical, for to him the presence of God "is woven into and works through the slightest movement of my consciousness in its solitary communion with itself."⁵⁵ The religious stage is

⁴⁸ *Postscript*, p. 216. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁵⁰ For a discussion of subjectivity see next chapter.

⁵¹ *Postscript*, pp. 119, 142.

⁵² *Samlede Værker*, VII, p. 498. Cf. *Postscript*, p. 506.

⁵³ *Postscript*, p. 507. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

superior to the ethical because it is an expression of deeper inwardness, for in the infinite passionate interest for his eternal happiness, the subject is in a state of the utmost tension, in the very extremity of subjectivity.⁵⁶ When Kierkegaard moves from the discussion of religion A to the paradoxical religiosity, he asks if there is a higher expression of inwardness than that posited by religion A, namely that subjectivity is the truth. This higher expression of inwardness is found by positing the opposite principle: Subjectivity is the untruth,⁵⁷ which is the supposition of Christianity. Christianity or the paradoxical religiosity is characterized by the deepest possible inwardness expressed in feeling, suffering, and pathos, and this inwardness is heightened by the relationship to a paradox as a repellent. The great problem of the stages from immediacy to Christianity is the reconstruction of personality from the foundation, a reconstruction in inwardness which according to Kierkegaard culminates only in Christianity.

The relationship of the stages may also be described in terms of their relationship to time.⁵⁸ For the aesthetic mode of life time has no significance, enjoyment culminates in the moment, and the moment alone has significance. The ethical mode of life accentuates time as the necessary medium, for the ethical task is not for the moment since the ethical has eternal significance. Religion A emphasizes time still more by presenting the task of a decisive transformation of the personality to occur in time. Within Christianity time is emphasized paradoxically by making something temporal commensurable for a decision that involves an eternal happiness.

While there appears to be what we might term a "norm" for the arrangement of the various stages in the order of their values, this "norm" is probably not so much a basis for the arrangement of the stages as a *description* of the relationship which exists between the various modes of life. Kierkegaard's problem was after all not to establish

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52. Cf. p. 51. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁵⁸ David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, pp. 176-177.

the objective validity of Christianity, but to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian.

Kierkegaard makes a sharp distinction between logic and existence or, in other words, between thought (interpreted as possibility) and reality. In this connection he presents two theses:⁵⁹ (1) *A logical system is possible*, and (2) *An existential system is impossible*. Our present concern is not the metaphysical significance and validity of these statements but the significance of such a position for the transition from one existence-sphere to another, or its significance for ethico-religious choice or decision. Kierkegaard argues that logic is the category of the abstract, of concepts. He never tires of ridiculing "Hegel's unparalleled discovery, the subject of so unparalleled an admiration, namely the introduction of movement into logic."⁶⁰ He regards as the fundamental principle of logic—the Eleatic doctrine: Nothing comes into being, everything is; a doctrine which belongs purely to the realm of logic and which in consequence of a misunderstanding was transferred to the realm of existence.⁶¹ Existence on the other hand is becoming. Hence the conclusion: Nothing must be incorporated into a logical system that has any relation to existence.⁶²

When Kierkegaard formulated this position, he was not concerned with the problem of knowledge but with the problem of action, with existence. "An existential system is impossible."⁶³ By this he did not mean to imply that there was no such system, that is, for God, but that there can be no such system for an existing human personality, for existence is becoming. In drawing the distinction between thought and action he assigns to thought the sphere of the possible, the disinterested, the objective, and to action the sphere of the subjective. By action he does not mean the external act, but "an internal decision in which the individual puts an end to the mere possibility and

⁵⁹ *Postscript*, pp. 99-113. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶¹ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 12.

⁶² *Postscript*, pp. 99, 150.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

identifies himself with the content of his thought in order to exist in it.⁶⁴ As long as the action is merely a contemplated action, it is merely a possibility subject to repudiation.⁶⁵ The transition from possibility to actuality is a leap,⁶⁶ an act of isolation,⁶⁷ never necessary, but always contingent. While it presents itself as possible it also presents itself as possible of nonrealization.⁶⁸ There is no transition from reflection to decision except by a breach of continuity, by a leap.⁶⁹ No introduction, however long, can bring the individual a single step nearer to an absolute decision.⁷⁰ The relationship of the leap to an individual existence is that it has either taken place and is in the past, or that it will take place,⁷¹ but a present relationship to something in the future is *eo ipso* an uncertain relationship that has the nature of a venture. When the certainty is present the venture becomes impossible.⁷²

In dealing with the leap, the venture, the decision, the choice, it is important to remember that Kierkegaard is not concerned with relative and habitual choices. He thinks in larger dimensions. It is the absolute choice, the choice which assumes infinite significance for the individual. Such a choice or venture transforms the individual. Before he makes the venture he cannot understand it as anything else than "madness." After he has made the absolute venture he becomes another individual. "Thus there is made room for the transition and its decisiveness, an intervening yawning chasm, a suitable scene for the infinite passion of the individual, a gulf which the understanding cannot bridge either forward or backward."⁷³ In the case of the aestheticist the transition from immediacy to the ethical mode of life was by an absolute choice which involved his whole personality.⁷⁴ The transition from the ethical to the religious existence-sphere was made by means of the abso-

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 302. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 304. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 93.

⁶⁸ David F. Swenson, *Something About Kierkegaard*, p. 163.

⁶⁹ *Postscript*, p. 262. ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 343. ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 380. ⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 379. ⁷⁴ *Either/Or*, II, pp. 175, 177.

lute resignation (repentance) and through faith.⁷⁵ Faith is the leap *par excellence*, a transition which requires divine assistance.⁷⁶ Faith lays hold of the improbable⁷⁷ and Christianity becomes the absolute venture, and the absolute risk, since it requires that the individual shall believe against his understanding.⁷⁸ According to Kierkegaard faith therefore is not a category of possibility prior to knowledge, so that one may later go beyond faith;⁷⁹ faith is the final Christian medium of existence.

⁷⁵ *Fear and Trembling*, pp. 64-66, 69-71, 147, 153-154.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153; *Postscript*, p. 230. ⁷⁷ *Postscript*, p. 209. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

⁷⁹ Kierkegaard constantly ridiculed H. L. Martensen and those who made faith a first immediacy, and then proceeded beyond faith.

CHAPTER VII

ETHICO-RELIGIOUS TRUTH AS SUBJECTIVITY



An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.¹



KIERKEGAARD accepts the fundamental assumption that the human soul is rooted in God, designed to live in harmony with God, and that it has its highest and most comprehensive unity in God. This assumption he has in common with Hegel and the German idealism as a whole.² Kierkegaard regards man as a synthesis of soul and body, of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity.³ The human "self" has not constituted itself, it is a derived "self," not independent of God, but dependent upon him.⁴ He expresses the same idea religiously with a somewhat mystic tone-color. "Love's secret life is in the heart, unfathomable, and it also has an unfathomable connection with the whole of existence. As the peaceful lake is grounded deep in the hidden spring which no eye can see, so a man's love is grounded even deeper in the love of God. If there were at bottom no well-spring, if God were not love, then there would be no quiet lake or human love. As the quiet lake is grounded darkly in the deep spring, so is human love mysteriously grounded

¹ *Postscript*, p. 182.

² Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, III, p. 22.

³ *Samlede Værker*, IV, pp. 315, 355; *Postscript*, p. 350; *Sickness unto Death*, p. 17.

⁴ *Sickness unto Death*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 18.

in God's love.⁵ Deep down in my soul you implanted the blessed assurance that you are love."⁶

Since the human self is a derived self, it is dependent upon and under obligation to God.⁷ Sin is therefore defined as whatever hinders or prevents the human self from realizing its relationship to God and doing His will.⁸ Faith on the other hand is the full realization of the relationship, "that the self in being itself is grounded transparently in God."⁹

Kierkegaard ridicules the idea of proving the existence (*Dasein*) of God.¹⁰ Since God is *terminus medius* of all human action and thinking, it is logically impossible to prove His existence (*Dasein*).¹¹ Furthermore, one reasons from existence and not toward existence, both in the realm of empirical facts and in the realm of thought. Thus, one does not prove that a stone exists, but that some existing thing is a stone.¹² Since God is present, it is an insult to prove His existence. It implies that one has failed to recognize Him, or that one has ignored Him. God's presence is proved by worship and not by intellectual proofs.¹³

Man's conscience and every moral consciousness presupposes God, for to have a conscience is to relate oneself to God.¹⁴ Kierkegaard accepted the Socratic principle that "self-knowledge" is a knowledge of God.¹⁵ God does not reveal Himself in the objective world round about us; He reveals Himself as the foundation for the subjective.¹⁶ Kierkegaard's thoughts about the relationship of man to God may be summed up in the statement: God is not object but subject.¹⁷

Kierkegaard often endows common words with new

⁵ *Works of Love*, translated by Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 8.

⁶ *The Journals*, No. 117. ⁷ *Sickness unto Death*, p. 131.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156. ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132. ¹⁰ *Papirer*, V A 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, V A 42. ¹² *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 31.

¹³ *Postscript*, p. 485; cf. *Crucial Situations*, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Samlede Værker*, IX, p. 137; cf. *Works of Love*, p. 116; *Papirer*, VII A 10, 201.

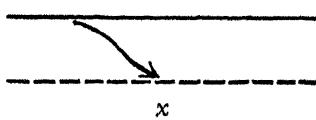
¹⁵ *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 7. ¹⁶ *Papirer*, X, 3 A 421.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, VII A 201; Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, III, pp. 26, 28.

meaning, thus "to exist" and "existence" receive an entirely new connotation. Since man is a synthesis of soul and body, of the temporal and the eternal, existence is defined as the synthesis of the infinite and the finite. It should be kept in mind that this thought is basic in everything Kierkegaard has written about existence. To exist means to realize the task which the synthesis presents, namely to bring the eternal into the temporal.¹⁸ "Existence is the child that is born of the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal."¹⁹ Kierkegaard's philosophy of existence is extremely paradoxical. The existing subject has the infinite within himself, but being an existing individual, he is temporal and in the process of becoming.²⁰

The existing individual is not an abstract *x* which passes through certain experiences and goes on without assimilating them. He becomes concrete in his experience, and the experience becomes a determining factor in his personality. Were he to lay aside his experience he would lose his own self.²¹ Existence is the highest interest of the individual, and this interest in his existence constitutes his reality.²²

The existing attitude toward life is illustrated in the following diagram by E. Geismar:²³



the upper line signifies the eternal, or the background of the consciousness, the absolute, which is to be expressed in time. To express it is to exist. The dotted line signifies the moments of time, and *x* represents the particular moment when the eternal is brought into the temporal. This attitude to life faces the future. The speculative attitude is the very opposite:

¹⁸ *Postscript*, pp. 76, 350.

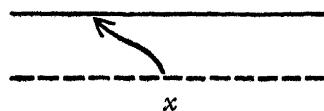
¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 85.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 279.

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, III, pp. 67-68.



Instead of regarding the eternal as the future ("becoming") which is to be realized as a task, its concern for the eternal is speculative, directed toward the past (the eternal is regarded as "being"). The same diagrams also illustrate what Kierkegaard regarded as the difference between Greek and Christian religiosity.²⁴ Socrates had his God-relationship secured in the past in the doctrine of the eternal recollection, which to him had become a proof of the immortality of the soul. Christianity has its God-relationship in "the repetition"²⁵ which immediately makes the eternal a task to be realized. The Greeks had the eternal behind them. Christianity faces the eternal. Although the Greek conception of preexistence may have been discarded, all idealistic speculation has eternity or ideality in the past.²⁶ This distinction between the past and the future reference to eternity is basic in every differentiation between "speculation" and "existence" in the *Postscript*. The Greek conception of the eternal is also present in Christian theological terminology: an eternal creation, an eternal procession from the Father, an eternal coming into being of the Deity, an eternal self-sacrifice; a past resurrection, a past judgment. "All these thoughts are essentially the Greek doctrine of Recollection."²⁷

The terms "subjective" and "subjectivity" have in recent years been used of the distortion of reality by the personal equation. In philosophy the term "subjectivism" refers to the viewing of things exclusively through the medium of one's own mind and individuality. In theology (as in the case of Schleiermacher and Ritschl) "subjectivity"

²⁴ *Repetition*, pp. 3-6, 33-34; *The Concept of Dread*, pp. 73-83.

²⁵ *Supra*, pp. 70-73.

²⁶ Hegel's universal mind as revealed in the historical world-process.

²⁷ *Philosophical Fragments*, p. 6.

(German, *Subjektivität*) refers to that tendency which seeks the organ or the criteria of religious truth in the intimations of the individual's inner consciousness rather than in history and objective revelation.

In any scientific account of the truth, the truth exists independently of the individual, and subjectivity, the personal equation, is the enemy to be feared. Kierkegaard, however, does not deal with the objective or scientific search for the truth. He is concerned with the ethico-religious *relationship* of the individual. He maintains that ethico-religious truth is not an addition to our intellectual furniture, but that such truth lies in the *personal appropriation*. The emphasis is upon the "how" rather than upon the "what." The question is not, "Is the individual related to something which is objectively true?" but, "Is the relationship a true relationship?" The emphasis is moved from the dogmatic and objective realm to the subjective and psychological realm of appropriation.

Kierkegaard illustrates what he means: "If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol."²⁸

Kierkegaard wants to get away from the abstract thinking so common to the philosophical thinking of his day and to a personal appropriation by which the individual himself is transformed. This is what he means by truth as subjectivity.

Kierkegaard's famous thesis: "Truth is subjectivity"²⁹ does not refer to any theory of knowledge but to a person's mode of existence. *Objective thinking* translates everything into results, and the truth becomes an object. The

²⁸ *Postscript*, pp. 179-180. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-224.

thinking process is directed away from the thinking subject. In its maximum objective thinking makes the subject accidental. It is independent of the subject whose existence is indifferent as far as the validity of the objective truth is concerned.⁸⁰ Objective thinking leads to abstract thought, to mathematics, historical knowledge, etc. *Subjective thinking* turns its attention to the subject. The subjective thinker is essentially interested in his own thinking, which has the character of possession or inwardness.⁸¹ Subjective thinking puts everything into process and omits the results. It is constantly mindful of the fact that the subject is an existing individual, and that existence is a process of becoming.⁸² All decisiveness is rooted in subjectivity.⁸³

Kierkegaard has no quarrel with objective knowledge in the realm of science. He is not at all concerned about science, but about what he terms the essential knowledge or ethico-religious knowledge, knowledge that has an essential relationship to the knower. All other knowledge is, essentially viewed, accidental and indifferent to the existing individual.⁸⁴

The following quotation is probably Kierkegaard's most significant and most concise formulation of the problem: "*When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.*"⁸⁵

To the objective observer the last line of the above state-

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68, 171-173. ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68, 171-175.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 176. ⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 173, 181. ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177, 178.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178. Italics in the original.

ment must be disconcerting. However, since there is a "reduplication" of thought in the life of the individual the relationship is regarded as a true relationship.

In a footnote Kierkegaard explains that this statement refers only to essential truth or the truth which is essentially related to existence. The significance of the above differentiation becomes clear when applied to knowledge of God. For the objective reflection the problem is whether the object is the true God. For the subjective reflection the problem is whether the subject relates himself to a certain something *in such a manner* that it is in truth a God-relationship.³⁶ To Kierkegaard it is ridiculous to bring God to light objectively, for God is subject and exists only for subjectivity, and every objective search for him is merely an approximation process.³⁷

From the objective point of view all interest centers in thought-content; from the subjective point of view it centers in inwardness.³⁸ Truth (that is, the essential or ethico-religious truth) is defined in its antithesis to objective truth: "*An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth*, the highest truth attainable for an *existing* individual."³⁹ This definition of the truth is also regarded as the formula of faith.⁴⁰

With respect to Christianity, the subjective acceptance and the mode of the subject's acceptance is the decisive factor, the objective acceptance is plain thoughtlessness.⁴¹ Thus in the consciousness of sin an individual feels himself a sinner, not objectively—for that is plain nonsense—but subjectively. In the realm of the ethico-religious Kierkegaard's only concern and only approach to the problem is along the individual's mode of appropriation. The emphasis is never on the objective *WHAT* but always on the subjective *HOW*. Furthermore he denies every possibility of finding the ethico-religious truth by means of an objective approach, for such an approach can only be an approxima-

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115 f.

tion process, something which is incommensurable with an infinite concern.

With Kierkegaard's great emphasis upon subjectivity in the realm of ethico-religious truth, it is natural that his interest should be focused upon the individual rather than upon society. In *The Point of View for my Work as an Author* Kierkegaard states, "I was conscious of being a religious author and was concerned with 'the individual' . . . a thought in which is contained an entire philosophy of life and of the world."⁴² Kierkegaard's whole philosophy centers in the category, "the individual." The universal, the societal, or the "crowd" are not introduced as a link between the individual and the absolute. The crowd, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely irresponsible, is the untruth or falsehood.⁴³ "For 'crowd' is an abstraction and has no hands: but each individual has ordinarily two hands, and so when an individual lays his two hands upon Caius Marius, they are the two hands of the individual, certainly not those of his neighbor, and still less those of the crowd which has no hands."⁴⁴

Kierkegaard regarded "the individual" as his own peculiar category so wedded to his name that it would be a fitting inscription upon his grave.⁴⁵ This category he had learned from Socrates who had operated with it dialectically to disintegrate the sophistry of paganism.⁴⁶ In a similar manner Kierkegaard used "the individual" with the purpose of destroying the sophistry of Christendom in an age where everybody regarded himself as a Christian.

"'The individual' is the category through which, in a religious respect, this age, all history, the human race as a whole, must pass. And he who stood at Thermopylae was not so secure in his position as I who have stood in defence of this narrow defile, 'the individual,' with the intent of making people take notice of it. His duty was to prevent the hosts from pressing through the defile . . . my task is, if

⁴² *The Point of View*, p. 21. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 114. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁴⁵ *Papirer*, VIII A 108, 286, 482, 551. ⁴⁶ *The Point of View*, p. 138.

possible, to invite, to stir up the many to press through this defile of the individual, through which, however, no one can pass except by becoming the individual. . . . ‘The individual’—with this category the cause of Christianity stands or falls, since world-development has got so far along in reflection as it has. Without this category pantheism has triumphed absolutely. . . . The category of ‘the individual’ is and remains the fixed point which is able to resist the pantheistic confusion.”⁴⁷

With the adoption of the category of “the individual,” the category of the universal-human as proclaimed by Judge William in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life’s Way* and by Johannes de silentio in *Fear and Trembling* is completely discarded. According to Hegel the norm of ethics, or the universal, was to be discovered objectively in the historical process. Kierkegaard does not deny the presence of the ethical in the historical process, but he denies that the finite spirit can see it there in truth.⁴⁸ Only in one’s own personality can one study the ethical with any assurance of certainty, for the ethical is one’s consciousness with God.⁴⁹ When one looks to other persons, one sees the eth-

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 136-137. ⁴⁸ *Postscript*, p. 126.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138. Kierkegaard’s term *Samviden* (consciousness with) is rarely used in Danish literature. The term itself is difficult to translate. In the writings of Kierkegaard it refers to an intimate private knowledge or understanding shared by two persons or shared by a man and God. Various terms have been used as equivalents for *Samviden* in the English translations of Kierkegaard. Thus in *Either/Or*, II, p. 99, *den ægteskabelige Samviden* (the *Samviden* that exists between husband and wife) is wrongly translated “the collective knowledge of conjugal life.” In the *Postscript* three different terms are used for *Samviden*: “The ethical is his complicity with God” (p. 138); “From his cognizance none can flee” (p. 163); “This privy understanding with the ideal” (p. 488). ”

The late professor David F. Swenson translated *Samviden* as “consciousness with,” a term which I have consistently used. The following translations of my own will illustrate Kierkegaard’s use of the term:

“As Socrates so beautifully binds man to the divine by pointing out that all knowledge is recollection, so Plato feels himself inseparably joined to Socrates in a unity of spirit, so that for Plato all knowledge is a *consciousness with Socrates*.” *Samlede Værker*, XIII, p. 126. Italics mine.

“The ethical is a correlation to individuality, and to such a degree that every individual really apprehends the ethical essentially only in himself, because the ethical is his *consciousness with God*.” *Samlede Værker*, VII, p. 127, cf. *Postscript*, p. 138.

ical reflected in the external, and the more complicated the externality in which the ethical inwardness is reflected the more difficult becomes the problem of observation.⁵⁰ The ethical corresponds to individuality, and to such a degree that each individual can apprehend the ethical only in himself.⁵¹ The ethical is the inwardness of the spirit,⁵² and the distinctions good and evil "exist only in the individual and only in each individual's God-relationship."⁵³ If an individual sees something ethical, he sees it in himself.⁵⁴ The ethical is not the stage of world-history where the observers forget that they are actors. The ethical is the individual's own private theater where God is the only spectator and where the individual is indeed the actor.⁵⁵ "When the ethical is confused with the world-historical, so that it becomes essentially different when it has to do with millions from when it has to do with one, another confusion readily arises: namely that the ethical first finds its concrete embodiment in the world-historical, and becomes in this form a task for the living. The ethical is thus not the primitive, the most primitive of all that the individual has within him, but rather an abstraction from the world-historical experience."⁵⁶

"His judgment is the last, the only one; from the consciousness with him no one can escape, since it is woven into and works through the faintest movements of my consciousness in its secret communication with itself; *his presence is an eternal contemporaneity*—and that I should have dared to be ashamed of him." *Samlede Værker*, VII, p. 152; cf. *Postscript*, p. 163. The significant words in Italics are missing in the English translation.

"He who keeps silence accuses no one; he offends no one by his striving, for it is his triumphant conviction that in every man there is, and can, and shall be, this *consciousness with* the ideal which demands all and comforts only in the annihilation before God." *Samlede Værker*, VII, p. 478; cf. *Postscript*, p. 488.

To Kierkegaard God's presence in the conscience is an eternal contemporaneity with God, based upon the fact that man possesses a consciousness with God. Man's consciousness with God is an expression for the inescapability of the God-relationship. "In my conscience God's eye discovered me, and now it is impossible for me to forget that his eye sees me. Because God's eye looked upon me, I had to, and I have to, look upon God." *Papirer*, VIII A 158; cf. *The Journals*, No. 672.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138. ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 129. ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

According to Kierkegaard, "The only reality that *exists* for an individual is his own ethical reality. To every other reality he stands in a cognitive relation; but true knowledge consists in translating the real into the possible."⁵⁷ In all conceptual knowledge of reality, reality is lifted out of the realm of the actual into the realm of the possible. All *knowledge* of reality is possibility; the only reality to which an individual sustains a relationship which is more than cognitive is his own reality,⁵⁸ and reality is something which cannot be expressed in the language of abstraction.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 280. Italics mine. ⁵⁸ *Ibid.* ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RELIGIOSITY OF THE EDIFYING DISCOURSES



Neither is the struggle itself easy. If anyone wishes to delude himself by anticipating the quiet outcome of the struggle, its happy understanding, then the fault is not that of the discourse.... The struggle is to death.¹



DURING the period Kierkegaard published his aesthetic works, he also wrote and published a great number of religious discourses. While the aesthetic works were published under such pseudonymous names as Victor Eremita, Johannes *de silentio*, Constantine Constantius, Johannes Climacus, and others, the religious discourses were all published under his own name and invariably, with stereotyped uniformity, dedicated to his father. In the home it was the father's religious views and attitudes that became the formative influence in the life of Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard attached a special significance to the fact that *Two Edifying Discourses* accompanied the publication of *Either/Or*. There were published three months later and on his birthday, something which gave them a personal significance. On the day *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition* were given to the public *Three Edifying Discourses* appeared from another publishing house. These were again followed by other discourses. In the same manner *Philosophical Fragments* and *The Concept of Dread* were followed by *Four Edifying Discourses*. All of these early discourses were later issued by Kierkegaard in one volume, *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*.² They form a separate unit among his works and belong essentially together.

¹ *Edifying Discourses*, IV, p. 143.

² Translated by David F. Swenson and Lillian M. Swenson. Published by Augsburg Publishing House in four volumes.

The simultaneous publication of *Either/Or* and the *Two Edifying Discourses* was to indicate that Kierkegaard was not at first an aesthetic writer who later became a religious author. The religious was present from the very beginning, and while he wrote the aesthetic works, he himself lived in religious categories. Five years after the publication of *Either/Or* he wrote: "Although *Either/Or* attracted all the attention, and nobody noticed the *Two Edifying Discourses*, this book betokened, nevertheless, that the edifying was precisely what must come to the fore, that the author was a religious author, who for this reason has never written anything aesthetic, but has employed pseudonyms for all the aesthetic works, whereas the *Two Edifying Discourses* were by Magister Kierkegaard."³

The great work *Either/Or* was "much read and more discussed," but no one took serious notice of the *Two Edifying Discourses*,⁴ and Kierkegaard cryptically remarked: "I held out *Either/Or* to the world in my left hand, and in my right the *Two Edifying Discourses*; but all, or as good as all, grasped with their right hand what I held in my left."⁵ This explanation helps us to understand the words in the Preface to *Two Edifying Discourses* (1844 A.D.), where he states that the book seeks "that individual whom I with joy and gratitude call *my reader* who accepts with his right hand that which is offered with the right."⁶ This is a good indication that Kierkegaard regarded the discourses of greater significance than *Either/Or*.

In the prefaces to the various groups of *Edifying Discourses*⁷ we learn that they "are called 'discourses' not sermons, because its author has no authority to *preach*"; furthermore they are called " 'edifying discourses' not discourses for edification, because the speaker does not claim to be a *teacher*." Then again the prefaces repeat with stereotyped accuracy that the discourses are addressed to

³ *The Point of View*, p. 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶ *Edifying Discourses*, III, p. 5. Due to an error in the translation of the footnote p. 20 in *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard is made to say the very opposite of what he actually said.

⁷ *Edifying Discourses*, I, pp. 5, 59; II, p. 5; III, pp. 5, 69; IV, p. 5.

"that individual, whom with joy and gratitude I call *my reader*." There is also an appeal to the self-activity of the reader.

Kierkegaard states that he has no authority to preach. While he was not an ordained pastor, he had passed his theological examination and was thus authorized to preach in the Danish State Church, and on a few occasions he did preach in Copenhagen. There are, however, indications that Kierkegaard was leaning toward the view that a clergyman by virtue of his ordination possessed a *character indelebilis*, and therefore exercised an authority which the layman did not possess.⁸ However, this should not be regarded as Kierkegaard's ultimate view of the ministry. In the last year of his life he never ceased to heap aspersions upon the clergy and the organized church. In a preliminary draft to the preface of the *Two Edifying Discourses* he used the term sermons,⁹ and in his own diary he spoke of these two discourses as sermons.¹⁰ The "Ultimatum" or last part of *Either/Or* is also termed a sermon.

The distinction which Kierkegaard made between the sermon and the religious discourse lies deeper than the authority to preach. *The sermon corresponds to the specifically Christian categories, and these categories are not dealt with in the Edifying Discourses.* Johannes Climacus, the pseudonymous author of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* writes about the *Edifying Discourses*: "The preface reiterated the assertion that they were not sermons. This was something which I, too, would have protested against, if no one else, since *they employ only ethical categories of immanence, not the doubly reflected categories in the paradox*. Unless we are to have a confusion of tongues, the sermon must be reserved for the Christian-religious type of existence. Nowadays we sometimes hear sermons which resemble anything but sermons, because the categories are immanent. Perhaps the magister has wished indirectly to make this evident, by attempting to see how

⁸ *Postscript*, p. 244; *Papirer*, VII 2 B, p. 66; VIII A 6; *The Journals*, No. 629.

⁹ *Papirer*, IV B 143.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, IV A 83.

far it is possible to explore the realm of the edifying in a purely philosophical manner.”¹¹

The edifying discourses were philosophical and did not use the Christian categories.¹² “While [in the edifying discourses] the ethical requirement is maintained, while life and existence is accentuated as a toilsome way, the decision is not posited in a paradox. . . . The paradoxical expression for existence as sin, the eternal Truth as the paradox through having come into being in time, in short, whatever is decisive for the Christian-religious mode of existence is not to be found in the *Edifying Discourses*.¹³”

These discourses, then, are all within the sphere of the religiosity of immanence, and they do not employ the categories which are decisive for the Christian mode of life. They represent the first introduction of an individual into the religious stage, and more specifically into what Kierkegaard termed religion A.

Kierkegaard’s assertion that he was “without authority” may also have reference to his method of indirect communication. While he assumed the position that he was without authority and became entirely unreliable in the eyes of men, he presented the truth and thus forced them into a contradictory position from which they could only save themselves by a personal appropriation of the truth.¹⁴ He used the term “edifying discourses” rather than “discourses for edification” because he felt the latter term was too presumptuous.

Kierkegaard fully realized that “edifying” was an unpopular term with the philosophers. “It is strange what a hatred Hegel has for the edifying . . . but the edifying is not an opiate which lulls to sleep; it is the amen of the finite spirit and is an aspect of cognition which should not be overlooked.¹⁵

The purpose of the discourses is probably best expressed in Kierkegaard’s words about the “Ultimatum” in *Either/*

¹¹ *Postscript*, p. 229. Italics mine.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 230 note.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

¹⁴ *The Journals*, No. 432. Cf. *Papirer*, IV A 87.

¹⁵ *Papirer*, III A 6. Walter Lowrie’s translation of this passage in his *Kierkegaard*, p. 277, has completely missed the point.

Or. "The purpose of the sermon [and at this point Kierkegaard uses the term sermon with respect to the "Ultimatum"] is not to tranquilize nor to arrive at a metaphysical point of view, but to clear for action."¹⁶ The discourses are calculated to make the reader self-active. They have value only in so far as they are appropriated by the reader "who converts the speech into a conversation," who "thus sets free the magic of the written word," and who by making the author's thoughts his own does more for the author than the author can do for the reader.¹⁷ In a Socratic sense the author steps aside and "constantly desires only to be forgotten."¹⁸ The reader who benefits from the discourses owes the author nothing, for it was by virtue of his own activity he had learned it.

We recall that Søren Kierkegaard in his youth had been engaged to Regina Olsen, a girl still in her teens, and that soon after the engagement he realized that it was a great mistake. He broke the engagement, and yet never ceased to love her. The first two discourses were written primarily for Regina, in order that he might explain himself to her.¹⁹ Thus "that individual whom with joy and gratitude I call my reader"²⁰ referred originally to her. When the same phrase was repeated in the succeeding groups of discourses the word had no longer a personal reference. He had then arrived at his category, "the individual."²¹

Before we deal with the religiosity of the *Edifying Discourses* we shall briefly consider the religious position presented in the closing section of *Either/Or*, II. This is Judge William's ultimatum to the aestheticist, and in the pseudonymous framework of Kierkegaard it is presented as the sermon of a country pastor. The sermon which is entitled "The Edification Implied in the Thought that as Against God We Are Always in the Wrong," describes the transition from the ethical stage to religious suffering. The

¹⁶ *Papirer*, IV A 234. ¹⁷ *Edifying Discourses*, I, p. 59; III, p. 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, III, p. 69. ¹⁹ *Papirer*, X 1 A 266. ²⁰ *Edifying Discourses*, I, p. 5.

²¹ *The Point of View*, pp. 111-138.

reader is led to a point where he must choose whether he will relate himself to God in such a manner that over against God he is always in the wrong. The thought proceeds in this manner:

There is something painful in being wronged by another person, but there is repose and satisfaction in the knowledge that one is in the right. In other words, there is an edification in the thought that one is in the right. However, there may be situations where the very opposite is true, when the edification consists in the thought that one is in the wrong. "Your life brings you into manifold relationships with other people, to some of whom you are drawn by a more heartfelt love than you feel for others. Now if such a man who was the object of your love were to do you wrong, it would pain you deeply, would it not? You would carefully rehearse everything that had occurred—but then would you say, I know of myself that I am in the right, this thought shall tranquilize me? Oh, if you loved him, this thought would not tranquilize you, you would explore anew every possibility. You would not be able to come to any other conclusion but that he was in the wrong, and yet this certainly would disquiet you, you would wish that you might be in the wrong, you would try whether you could not find something which might speak in his defense, and if you did not find it, you would first find comfort in the thought that you were in the wrong."²²

In other words there might be a situation in life when it is impossible to recognize oneself as in the wrong and the loved one as in the right. It is impossible to deceive oneself in this respect. The position becomes contradictory. One wishes to be in the wrong and knows that one is in the right. However, if the loved one is God, could there ever be a question of such a contradiction? The sermon continues in a very personal vein. If you really love God, your soul could only find repose and edification in the thought that as against God you are always in the wrong. But the certainty that you are always in the wrong was not arrived

²² *Either/Or*, II, p. 288.

at by means of a logical deduction from the fact that God is always in the right. "From love's dearest and only wish, that you might always be in the wrong, you reached the apprehension that God was always in the right. . . . The certainty was due to the fact that you were edified by the thought."²³

To recognize that God is in the right and as a consequence of this to reach conclusions with respect to oneself is to "stand aloof from God."²⁴ It is an objective reflection. If on the other hand "in virtue of no foregoing recognition you claim and are convinced that you are always in the wrong, then you are hidden in God. *This is your divine worship, your religious devotion, your godly fear.*"²⁵

What would be the significance of such a position for the religious life? The sermon maintains that the edification is twofold: it checks doubt and incites to action.²⁶ The dialectic of doubt consists in that a man is sometimes right and sometimes wrong, to a certain degree right and to a certain degree wrong. But who is to decide about this except that man himself? And in deciding might he not be to a certain degree right and to a certain degree wrong? Or is the man when he judges his action different from the man when he acts?²⁷ A man cannot measure his relationship to God by a "more or less" or "to a certain extent," for this is characteristic of the temporal relationships, and such a relationship to God is no relationship, and can only serve as a nourishment for further doubts.²⁸ Doubt can only be checked in an infinite relationship to God. The position that man is always in the wrong is the wing upon which the religious man soars above the temporal. The thought that over against God we are always in the wrong expresses the fact that God's love is greater than our love—and does not this inspire to action? Furthermore, it excludes doubt which otherwise deprives a man of the power to act.²⁹

In all his writings Kierkegaard maintains that doubt is

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 290. ²⁴ *Ibid.* ²⁵ *Ibid.* Italics mine. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 291, 293.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 287. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293.

not checked by means of reflection but by an act of the will.

Again and again the sermon appeals to the subjective: "Could you wish that it was otherwise?" "Could you wish that you were in the right?" "Ask yourself and continue to ask yourself until you find the answer." Then come the concluding words: "For one may have known a thing many times, and acknowledged it, one may have willed a thing many times and attempted it, and yet it is only by the deep inward movements, only by the indescribable movements of the heart, that for the first time you are convinced that what you have known belongs to you, that no power can take it from you; for only the truth that edifies is truth for you."³⁰

We have already called attention to Kierkegaard's distinction between subjective and objective truth.³¹ In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* he deals with the philosophical aspect of this distinction. The presentation in the *Edifying Discourses* is of an earlier date. The germ of this position we find in a notation in the *Journals* written in his early youth: "The important thing is to understand the purpose of my own life, to grasp what God really wants *me* to do. The question is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I shall live and die*. What would it benefit me if I discovered a so-called objective truth. . . . What would it benefit me to be able to explain the meaning of Christianity . . . if it had no deeper meaning for me and my life. . . . I admit that I still accept an imperative of knowledge and that it may serve to influence people, but in that case knowledge must be incorporated as a living thing in my own life, and that is what I now regard as the most important."³²

The same personal concern for truth which we find in the above notation is basic in the *Edifying Discourses*. The introduction to the discourse "Remember Now Thy Creator in the Days of Thy Youth" may serve as an example: "There is a truth whose greatness, whose sublimity, we are

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³¹ *Supra*, pp. 113-116.

³² *Papirer*, I A 75. Italics mine. Cf. *The Journals*, No. 22.

accustomed to extol by saying that it is an *objective* truth, that it is equally valid whether one accepts it or not; indifferent to the special circumstances of the individual; . . . indifferent to its own relation to him, whether it benefits him or injures him; equally valid . . . whether he lays down his life for it . . . or merely repeats it by rote."³³ This is the objective truth, the scientific method so deified and glorified in our twentieth century.

When the object of contemplation belongs to the external world, the personality of the observer is only of relative importance. Objective knowledge is indifferent to the knower and fosters anxiety; it is ambiguous and cannot give religious certainty. A human being's relationship to the world consists of more than objective knowledge *about* the world and *about* himself, for in such knowledge he is indifferent to the world, and the world is indifferent to his knowledge about it. When a man really becomes concerned about himself and about his relationship to the world and to God, a greater measure of knowledge will not suffice; he will require another kind of knowledge, "a knowledge which at no moment persists as knowledge, but transforms itself in the moment of possession into action; for otherwise it is not possessed."³⁴ Such knowledge Kierkegaard calls subjective knowledge, concerned knowledge, or concerned truth. It is obvious that such knowledge does not relate itself to science but to ethico-religious truth. Knowledge of this nature is not indifferent to the individual "whether he appropriates it with his whole heart, or whether it merely becomes idle words to him."³⁵ Neither is such truth indifferent as to who has proclaimed it. An illustration of *concerned* truth is the admonition in Ecclesiastes, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."³⁶

"And if you could have heard the voice of him who uttered it, then you would certainly realize how moved he

³³ *Edifying Discourses*, III, p. 71. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, p. 101. Italics mine.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, III, p. 72. ³⁶ Ecclesiastes 12:1.

was personally, and if you could see his face . . . you would be gripped by the solicitude with which he concerned himself about you.”³⁷ Objective knowledge belongs in the realm of logic and necessity; subjective knowledge, on the other hand, can only be appropriated in freedom, and must also be produced in freedom.³⁸

In the first of the *Edifying Discourses*, “The Expectation of Faith,” we find a view of faith in harmony with the religiosity suggested in the sermon of *Either/Or*, II, a religiosity which was characterized by resignation, and which issues in a deliberate and passionate choice. “The Expectation of Faith” presents a fourfold characterization of faith. “(1) It was the new glory of faith that *no man can give it* to another, (2) but that what is highest, noblest, most sacred in man that every man has; *it is inherent in him*, (3) every man has it *if he wills to have it*; (4) and this is the glory of faith that it can only be had on this condition, therefore *it is the only unfailing good*, it can only be had through being constantly acquired, and can only be acquired by being constantly developed [or more correctly “brought forth”].”³⁹ Here we have a delineation of four aspects of faith. It is the highest unfailing good; it is imminent, it is incommunicable; and it is qualified by an act of the will.

Faith is the only unfailing good because it can only be had by being constantly acquired and brought forth. This is a determination of faith in terms of personal existence and not in terms of reflection. Faith is not merely an appropriation of something but a creative activity. Again, faith is determined as an act of the will. If a man does not possess it “there is but a single expression which explains his failure—that he did not will it.”⁴⁰ If he loses his faith, he alone is responsible, no one else can deprive him of it.⁴¹ Faith is not only a highest good but it is potentially and

³⁷ *Edifying Discourses*, III, p. 72.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 67, 100-103; II, pp. 8, 31-32; III, pp. 57, 79, 114-115.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 15. Italics and numerals are mine.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17. Cf. pp. 12, 15. ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

equally available to all. It is a good in which all can share.⁴² Faith is the quality by virtue of which a man is identical with every other man. The universality of faith is of course based upon the assumption that faith is immanent or inherent in all men. And again faith is something which cannot be communicated from one man to another. "One man can do much for another but he cannot give him faith."⁴³ Faith is furthermore a quality which "makes a man more lonely than do the greatest sufferings."⁴⁴

In our age with its emphasis upon progressive religious education the question arises: If religious faith is incomunicable, does not this make religious education superfluous? Kierkegaard anticipated such a question. If faith is immanent the only thing one man can do for another is in a Socratic sense to stimulate him to self-activity. "If he is not in possession of it [namely faith], then I can be very helpful to him: for I will accompany his thought, and urge him to perceive that it is the highest good, and I will prevent it from escaping into some hiding place where it might become obscure to him, whether he can understand it or not; with him I will penetrate every irregularity, until if he does not have it, there is but a single expression which explains his failure—that he did not will it; this he cannot endure, then he will acquire it. On the other hand, I will praise the glory of faith to him, *and as I assume that he possesses it, I bring him to will to own it.*"⁴⁵

In the dissertation, "The Rotation Method," in *Either/Or*, I, the aestheticist maintains that boredom is the root of all evil, and his ultimate solution for living a truly artistic life is to abandon hope, for hope is a very dubious pilot and shipmaster. In "The Expectation of Faith" we find Kierkegaard's reply to the aestheticist. First the position of the immediate aestheticist is stated: "The glad heart which had not yet tasted of life's adversities, which was not educated in the school of sorrow, which was not shaped by the dubious wisdom of experience, assists this expectation

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 10. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 13. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17. Italics mine.

[namely faith's expectation of victory]; for it expects victory in everything, in every conflict and exertion, or rather, it expects to conquer *without conflict*.⁴⁶

Then follows the position of the reflective aestheticist: "The troubled one does not expect victory, he has felt his loss too keenly, and even if it happened in the past, he still keeps it with him; he expects that the future will at least grant him peace for the quiet occupation with his pain."⁴⁷

After having dismissed the position of the experienced man who disapproves of both of the above positions, and whose solvent is "to a certain degree"—a solvent which can only give birth to doubt—the religious man asserts himself: "I expect victory."⁴⁸ This is the expectation of faith. But this faith is not based upon probability or insight. Hence it cannot be proved. Faith is not an intellectual position.⁴⁹ It is characterized by resignation, an act of the will.⁵⁰ It is firm and unchangeable, rooted in God. It is directed to the future and is other-worldly.⁵¹ Faith is the eternal power in man.

The second discourse is on the words, "Every good and every perfect gift is from above."⁵² These words are associated with Regina Olsen's first impression of Kierkegaard, and he had assured himself that she had read the discourse. The discourse describes the religious struggle of a disappointed and sorrowful person who by means of prayer seeks to influence God. But the request was denied, and furthermore there was no divine explanation of the denial. The result is the stupefying exhaustion of sorrow. But when the fruitless wishes had exhausted the soul, they developed the meekness which received the word. The heart of the discourse is probably found in the words: "That which he [the apostle] emphasizes is that God is constant, that He remains the same while everything else changes; that which he admonishes us to do is to love God, so that

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Italics mine.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 21.

⁵² James 1:17. For the significance of this text in the life of Kierkegaard see *Papirer*, x 4 A 540 or *The Journals*, No. 1247.

our being may come into likeness with His own, in order that we may win God in constancy, and save our souls in patience. He says nothing in these words about the quality of the particular gifts, but he speaks about God's eternal relation to the believer.”⁵³

Man cannot by means of his prayers change God. On the contrary God changes the existence of the religious man, and true religious life gains its permanence when it refers all things, both joys and sorrows, to God. The deepest and most beautiful love for God expresses itself in repentance. In repentance a man loves God according to his own imperfection; in repentance he receives everything from God.⁵⁴ Repentance must be so comprehensive in its scope that it not only receives with thanks the punishments suffered for sins, but also thanks God for all the various dispensations of Providence which it cannot explain. This really implies an unconditional resignation. Thus the solution or healing of the religious life as presented in this discourse is identical with that of the sermon in *Either/Or*, II, as against God we are always in the wrong.

The religiosity which refers all things to God in thanksgiving is also presented in a discourse on the words of Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” This text is associated with Søren Kierkegaard’s father. The words had been pronounced by the father at the grave of Kierkegaard’s mother and also at the burials of other close relatives. Bishop Mynster, who had officiated at these funerals wrote in a review of the discourse: “To me it is very touching that Magister S. Kierkegaard always dedicates his edifying discourses to the memory of his deceased father. For I also have known this venerable man. He was a plain and upright citizen with few demands upon life, and had never had a philosophical ‘bath.’ How then does it happen that the son with his great learning every time he writes edifying discourses constantly turns his thoughts back to this man who long since entered into rest! Whoever has read that charming discourse—or

⁵³ *Edifying Discourses*, I, p. 45. Italics mine. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

rather, let us call it a sermon—‘The Lord Gave, the Lord Hath Taken Away, Blessed Be the Name of the Lord,’ will understand it. The son, even as I, had seen his old father in bitter bereavements fold his hands and bend his venerable head; he had heard the father’s lips pronounce those words, and had also seen his entire being declare it in such a manner that he himself felt what he so beautifully develops concerning Job, that he also is a teacher of men, who had no doctrine to transmit to others, but who left himself as an example for mankind, who left his life as an example for all men who saw it. He has felt that the old man in his devout word had overcome the world, was through his devout word greater and stronger and more powerful than the whole world.”⁵⁵

The discourse is an illustration of the dialectic by which Kierkegaard slowly but steadily strips the human soul of all things, and leaves it naked before God. The reader is to make the words his own, and thus experience his nothingness before God.

Job’s religiosity expressed itself in his manner of meeting the adversities of life. While he surrenders himself to sorrow, the sorrow does not bring him to the point of despair. He is swift to judge between God and himself. With the words, “Naked came I forth from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither,” the struggle is decided. Then follows the confession, “The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”⁵⁶ When everything is taken away from him, his heart first of all expands in thanksgiving to God, who had given him the blessings. Not sorrow alone, but worship prostrated him on the ground before God. Reflective doubt may find other reasons for Job’s loss. The loss might have been caused by an accident which no one could account for. True religiosity, however, shifts everything over upon the Lord.⁵⁷ Job did not lose his religiosity in reflection or explanation of

⁵⁵ Valdemar Ammundsen, *Søren Kierkegaards Ungdom, hans Slægt og hans religiøse Udvikling* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1912), p. 13. Translation mine.

⁵⁶ *Edifying Discourses*, II, p. 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

the accident which might have brought about the loss. "In his loss he remains in an understanding with the Lord."⁵⁸ He gathers together all his sorrows and casts them all upon the Lord, and only praise remains.

In two discourses entitled "Love Covers a Multitude of Sins" Kierkegaard traces Christian love to its original idea (or German, *Urbild*). The presentation is no doubt influenced by Augustine.⁵⁹ The first discourse addresses itself to the perfect,⁶⁰ and speaks of love as a relationship between man and man. Christian love differs from the pagan concept of love, for the pagan concept concealed the idea of revenge, hence it could not cast out fear. Again the Christian concept differs from the Jewish idea of love, for the Jew knew how to hate his enemy, and even ascribed vengeance to the Lord.⁶¹ Christian love is permanent; it never changes and is never resolved into something else. "Only this is love which never becomes something else, this which gives *everything* and because of this demands nothing, this which demands nothing, and therefore has nothing to lose, this which blesses, and blesses when it is cursed, this which loves its neighbor, but whose enemy is also his neighbor, this which leaves vengeance to the Lord, because it comforts him to believe that the Lord is even more merciful than he himself is."⁶² While sin discovers the multitude of sins, love covers them. "If love had triumphed in the world, then would all the multitude of sins be hidden, and everything would be perfect in love."⁶³

The second discourse on love addresses itself to the imperfect.⁶⁴ "He who does not find in himself a multitude of sins which need to be covered, to him the word does not apply."⁶⁵ In this discourse the thought takes another turn, and the relationship is no longer between man and man, but between man and God. When the love of heaven looks down upon man, all self-righteousness vanishes, and the man who has always given each man his due, and who

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23. ⁵⁹ *Papirer*, IV B 148. ⁶⁰ *Edifying Discourses*, I, p. 66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63. ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 63. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

could rejoice in the thought of rendering an account to God on the day of judgment discovers within himself a multitude of sins, and now love goes on to increase the multitude of sins. But the same power which uncovers and increases the multitude of sins "when it pours the concern of love into the human heart," is also able to cover the multitude of sins. Not even the great judgment day can discover the multitude of sins when God's love conceals it.⁶⁶

Three of the discourses deal with what Kierkegaard in his philosophical writings terms the infinite double movement, i.e., the renunciation of the world (resignation), and the regaining of it (the movement of faith). They describe the religious suffering in which a person's immediate relationship to the world and his desire for temporal happiness are broken to pieces and destroyed; but after this break with the temporal world, he receives the temporal back. Now, however, the relationship is different, for the temporal no longer yields the controlling power over him.

The discourse, "Strengthened in the Inner Man," describes how the temporal is regained through the religious concern in which the inner man proclaims himself. When a man becomes concerned about himself, and about the significance which all the things that bind him to the temporal world really have for him, and about his relationship to God, then the inner man proclaims himself. In this concern the inner man demands an explanation or a testimony which will explain to him the significance of all things, as well as his own significance. But such an explanation is not a matter of objective knowledge so that it can be decided once and for all. "God is a Spirit and therefore can give only spiritual testimony, that is, in the inner man, every external testimony from God, if one could imagine such a thing, is only a deception."⁶⁷ The testimony is an inner certainty which at the moment of possession transforms itself into action.⁶⁸

For the person who is religiously concerned, power,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 88.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-103.

prosperity, and adversity may all serve to strengthen the inner man. When he meets prosperity he will anxiously inquire whence it comes, for he knows that even the devil can bestow upon a man the glories of the kingdoms of this world. As the prosperity increases his concern, he is proportionately strengthened in the inner man. Now he can rejoice in his prosperity, but his rejoicing is quite different from that of the worldly man, for through his concern he possesses the world as one who does not own it. "Then he rejoices over all the good gifts, but even more he rejoices over God and with God who gave them. Then he delights his eyes with the splendor of the earth. He rejoices that his storehouses are full, builds his barns larger, and confidently lies down to sleep. And when the call comes: 'Tonight will I require thy soul from thee,' then he understands the demand, is quickly ready, and knows better about his soul which he will take with him, than about all the glory he had possessed, and which he now leaves behind."⁶⁹

It is quite natural that adversity should bring concern, but it does not necessarily lead to concern about one's relationship to God. If the concern is merely related to the outward, with no reference to a man's relationship to God, it may lead to despair.⁷⁰ But he whose concern is of a religious nature will be strengthened in the inner man, and in his concern he will receive the testimony.

"But as his concern increased it increased also in stillness and humility, so that however much he suffered, he always chose to remain with his temptation [Danish: *Anfægtelse*, equivalent to German: *Anfechtung*] rather than to be any other place on earth. Then at last the testimony burst forth in a full assurance of faith; for he who believes God against the understanding is strengthened in the inner man."⁷¹

Both prosperity and adversity can serve for the strengthening of the inner man, when the concern is of a religious nature, yet the strengthening and the testimony no man can give himself "for the testimony itself is a gift from God."⁷²

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 113.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Another discourse dealing with the infinite double movement, "The Expectation of an Eternal Happiness" gives us the basic supposition for Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion. The concern for an eternal happiness is a criterion of all religiosity. The religious life is motivated by an infinite concern for an eternal happiness, a concern so intense that it transforms the individual's whole existence into conformity with the highest good. On this basis religion is not defined in terms of objective knowledge but subjective appropriation. Eternity is the goal and an eternal happiness the measuring rod of the religious life. Kierkegaard fully realized the unpopularity of other-worldliness with those who associated religion with culture. An eternal happiness had become "a loose and idle word," a forgotten article, "An aged and infirm pensioner who sustains his life in the house of the rich on the wretched crumbs of poverty."⁷³

The expectation of an eternal happiness gives to a man the true perspective in life, and a means by which he may understand himself in his temporal existence. "When the demands of life exceed the judgment of experience, then life becomes confused and comfortless, unless the expectation of an eternal happiness regulates and calms it."⁷⁴ The religious man applies the measuring rod of eternity to every temporal experience, and thus he understands himself in his earthly existence. In sickness, affliction, and adversity he takes up his measuring rod, and the affliction becomes brief and the suffering light, for the bliss of heaven comforts beyond measure.⁷⁵

On the other hand, he who is rooted in the temporal, and for whom the eternal has no real significance, will gradually become incapable of considering the eternal. He is a child of the temporal, but the temporal is unfortunately both perishable and at variance with itself.⁷⁶

The certainty of an eternal happiness is not obtained by means of objective proofs. The happiness of heaven is so great a good that it needs no augmentation through any external circumstance. There is always an objective uncer-

⁷³ *Ibid.*, III, p. 97. ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109. ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107. ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

tainty, and this uncertainty expresses "that he expects eternal happiness by the grace of God."⁷⁷ Kierkegaard points out that there are times when men have sought another kind of certainty than that of concern. They have drawn up conditions and criteria by which men might be assured of an eternal happiness. But this is "to hang eternity in a cobweb" and to seek a temporal assurance for the eternal.⁷⁸

The third discourse dealing with the infinite double movement is "Man's Need of God Constitutes His Highest Perfection."

The discourse has as its purpose to do "what the sorrows and tribulations of life sometimes effect, namely, the stripping of a man of his possessions in order to discover how little he needs,"⁷⁹ and ultimately to bring him to the place where he realizes that "the highest of human tasks is for a man to allow himself to be completely persuaded that he can of himself do nothing, absolutely nothing."⁸⁰ Every human effort is excluded and all man's striving can only bring him closer to the place where he becomes more and more impotent. "It is in this sense that man is great, and he arrives at the highest pitch of perfection when he becomes united to God through becoming absolutely nothing in himself."⁸¹ Toward the end of the address we find these weighty words: "Just as the self-knowledge which reveals one's nothingness is the necessary condition for knowing God, so the knowledge of God is the condition for the sanctification of each human being in accordance with his specific end. Wherever God exists in truth there He is always creative. It is not His will that men should bask in the *contemplation* of His glory in spiritual sloth; but He wishes, through coming to be known of man, to create in him a new man."⁸²

The reader who wishes to benefit by the discourse must not be in a hurry but read very slowly, for to learn by rote that man can do absolutely nothing of himself is one thing, and to arrive at this result existentially—that is, in one's

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 118. ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, iv, p. 8.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22. ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26. ⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47. Italics mine.

own personal experience—is quite another matter. Let the reader take his time; let him get the full impact of Kierkegaard's teasing and subtle dialectic where the thoughts become spearpoints "which wound unto death in order to save the life";⁸³ let him enter into the struggle through which little by little he is stripped of "wealth and power and influence, and the deceitful service of false friendship, and the obedient subjection of his pleasures to the whim of his desires and the triumphs of his vanity";⁸⁴ let him "cut down the bridge of probabilities" and "renounce the intercourse which the worldly mind has with the future";⁸⁵ let him retire into his own self where discovering his nothingness he can make an unconditional surrender; let him enter into the fearful struggle with the "deeper self" and thus learn "what he perhaps failed to learn from the world, that he can do absolutely nothing."⁸⁶

The break with the temporal is described in a following beautiful illustration taken from the *Journals*. There are several sketches of this illustration,⁸⁷ and it has been partly used in *Fear and Trembling* and in *Edifying Discourses*.⁸⁸ The notation reads: "When the child is to be weaned, the mother blackens her breast, but her eyes are as full of love as ever when they rest upon the child. The child believes that the breast has changed, but the mother is unchangeable. And why does she blacken her breast? 'Because,' says she, 'it would be pitiful that the breast should be attractive when the child must not have it.'"⁸⁹ Then Kierkegaard adds the following significant words. "This collision is easily solved, for the breast is only a part of the mother. Happy is he who does not experience collisions more fearful than this." By nature man prefers temporal happiness. He would rather nurse at the breast of the temporal and rest in the cradle of the finite, while probability rocks the cradle, than risk the leap into the love of God.⁹⁰

The Last of the *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, "The

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 11. ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9. ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁷ *Papirer*, IV B 83-85.

⁸⁸ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 12; *Edifying Discourses*, IV, p. 34.

⁸⁹ *Papirer*, IV A 76. ⁹⁰ *Edifying Discourses*, IV, p. 34.

Righteous Man Strives in Prayer with God and Conquers—in that God Conquers,”⁹¹ is a psychological presentation of a man who truly prays. The significance of the Danish title is not so much that of a righteous man praying as that of a man who really prays in truth. Kierkegaard had no use for a purely objective presentation of prayer. He believed in prayer, but to him “prayer is not an easy matter; it is a task which requires all the efforts of the soul.”⁹² “Christ sweat blood when he prayed.— Now the pastor proves with three reasons that prayer really is something worth while.”⁹³ Though an angel from heaven described with celestial eloquence the benefits of prayer, it would not help the worldly man, for he neither understands nor cares for the values of prayer. But one may ask, If this be the case what value is there at all in Kierkegaard’s discourse on prayer? The discourse performs its mission when it is not merely appropriated by the understanding, but becomes a means of venture, *for the man who does not get beyond reflection is in the service of probability and has never made the eternal decision.*

The man who prays must be careful that his prayer has the right “form.” By “form” Kierkegaard does not mean the outward phrasing of the prayer, but the inwardness and very essence of prayer, i.e., “the true spirit of devotion in the inner man.”⁹⁴ It is not the numerous desires and the long list of wants which constitute prayer. The desires, the wants, the wishes are all temporal. They often cease to exist long before a man dies, but inwardness remains forever. “Inwardness is the eternal, and the wish is the temporal. But the temporal cannot keep up with the eternal. So the wish becomes less and less glowing, until at last its time is passed. But inwardness never ceases; so inwardness has conquered.”⁹⁵ When inwardness has conquered, the petitioner no longer seeks God in the outward, nor does he create God in his wishes, but he finds Him in his innermost being.⁹⁶

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-143.

⁹² *Papirer*, IV B 165.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, VIII 1 A 304.

⁹⁴ *Edifying Discourses*, IV, p. 121.

⁹⁵ *Papirer*, V B 227:5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The religious struggle in the discourse begins with the petitioner seeking the fulfillment of his own wish, but as the prayer proceeds, God becomes the chief end and not merely a means of fulfilling the wish. In other words, the petitioner lets go of the temporal. He cannot by his prayers change the will of him who is infinite wisdom and love, but in the prayer-struggle the petitioner who truly prays, conquers—in that God conquers. “Or was it not a victory, that instead of receiving an explanation from God, he was himself transfigured in God, which transfiguration consists in this: that he reflects God’s image?”⁹⁷

The *Eighteen Edifying Discourses* end, as they began, by letting go of the temporal in order to gain God and the eternal.

It is not possible within the scope of this book to consider in full all of the edifying discourses, but we have briefly considered the most important of them. In all of the discourses there is an emphasis upon crises in human experience. Thus the purpose of the discourse entitled “The Thorn in the Flesh” is not to bring consolation or to say something reassuring, but to emphasize the terror. “For woe to him who would edify without knowing the terror.”⁹⁸ The danger is real; it is that of losing one’s soul. No one has deliberately placed himself in this danger. “It has come about quite simply and naturally from the fact that he was conceived in transgression and born in sin, for through birth he became exposed to the danger in which he now is.”⁹⁹ Even in the presentation of the religiosity where God is regarded as immanent, Kierkegaard does not get away from the thought of inherited sin. In the religious healing God is the actor, though the healing is brought about by man’s concentration of his own efforts. “God Himself . . . knows how to utilize a man’s own anxieties for the purpose of extirpating all his self-confidence, and when he is about to sink down into his own nothingness, it is again God who can best keep him from continuing to

⁹⁷ *Edifying Discourses*, IV, p. 142.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

maintain a diver's under-water connection with his earthly self."¹⁰⁰ The religious struggle is a mortal conflict.¹⁰¹

The religious life begins with resignation or renunciation,¹⁰² and its permanent characteristic is suffering. The religious suffering is especially emphasized in the discourse, "The Thorn in the Flesh." To Kierkegaard religious suffering is not something accidental or complementary, it is the essential criterion of the religious life. The suffering lies in the tension between the eternal and the temporal. "The thorn in the flesh is the contrast to the unspeakable bliss of the spirit. . . . To have been made utterly rich in God, and now to be crushed to flesh and blood, to dust and corruption! To have been in the presence of God, and now to be forsaken of God."¹⁰³ He who had been carried up into the third heaven is now "tethered by the thorn in the flesh in the thraldom of temporal existence" and "the pain is unspeakable because it cannot even express its loss."¹⁰⁴ Suffering is held to be essential to the religious life, and without suffering no man can enter the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁵

In the *Edifying Discourses* the unfailing nature of the religious expectation is presented over against the disappointments of the temporal which is passing.¹⁰⁶ The religious man does not withdraw himself from the tasks of everyday life. To him "the earth is beautiful enough as a halting place for one who expects an eternity, but not beautiful enough to make a man forget that he is still only on the way."¹⁰⁷ The religious is not something occasional; it is constantly with the individual,¹⁰⁸ and it consists in the fact that the object of one's expectation—an eternal happiness—transforms the individual.¹⁰⁹ True religiosity is otherworldly, "the heavenly expectation begins precisely at the moment when earthly expectation sinks down in weakness and despair."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19. ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143. ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, I, p. 97; IV, p. 102.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 61. ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 50, 51. ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106. ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54. ¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

According to the *Edifying Discourses* religious faith is not a probability or a hypothetical belief which is later resolved into knowledge. Faith is the *ultimate*, the very last word in the relationship between God and man. From a human point of view faith is the most foolish bargain ever made in the world.¹¹¹ "Faith is what the Greeks termed divine madness."¹¹² Both faith and doubt are defined in terms of passion. "Doubt is a profound and cunning passion."¹¹³ Doubt is an anxiety which robs life of its stability and peace.¹¹⁴ There is according to the discourses a true use of doubt, namely when doubt, instead of being directed against the eternal verities, becomes concerned about itself, and about the things which are temporal and transitory. False doubt doubts everything but itself; saving doubt doubts only itself by the assistance of faith.¹¹⁵ Both scepticism and despair are centered in the will rather than in the understanding.¹¹⁶

There is in the presentation of the discourses an emphasis on the equality of all men. This equality is of a religious nature and must not be confused with a temporal or social equality, which is only an equality in externals. Kierkegaard is concerned with the equality of all men before God. In the temporal world "the external life takes a vain pride in the social distinction."¹¹⁷ But in the realm of the religious all externals are laid aside, and "there is true equality, saving and equally saving for all."¹¹⁸ In the world of the spirit every individual is invited, and no one is excluded except the one who excludes himself.¹¹⁹ Religiously the task is not to abolish the social or economic differences, but to liberate oneself in equality before God.¹²⁰

We have in this chapter merely scratched the surface of the rich deposits of religious ore found in the *Edifying Discourses*. The study of Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 136. ¹¹² *Papirer*, IV A 109.

¹¹³ *Edifying Discourses*, I, p. 26. ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p. 39. ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, III, p. 49. ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, p. 46. ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, p. 60. ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, p. 48.

is usually approached from the aesthetic and philosophical writings, but could be equally well approached through his religious writings, where we are not handicapped by the mystification of an involved pseudonymity and indirect communication.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRANSITION TO CHRISTIANITY

GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS—SIN-CONSCIOUSNESS



No man can see God without purity and no man can know God without becoming a sinner.¹



AMONG Kierkegaard's aesthetic and pseudonymous works the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* represents the transition to the Christian mode of life. Johannes Climacus the pseudonymous author of the *Postscript* does not profess to be a Christian; he is a humorist, content with the situation as it is at the moment, yet hoping that something higher might be granted him.² However, he posits the question, "Now I ask *how I am to become a Christian.*"³ This question constitutes the problem of the whole book. The later pseudonymous works, *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Training in Christianity* present the Christian mode of life, but from an extraordinary point of view.

Among the religious writings of Kierkegaard the eighteen *Edifying Discourses* represent a mode of life within the religiosity of immanence. These discourses, though of a definite religious character, do not present the Christian mode of life, but explore the possibilities of the religious life within the realm of immanence. Among the religious writings the little book, *Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life* (Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions) represents the transition to the Christian religiosity. The book contains three discourses: 1. "What It Means to Seek God"; 2. "Love Conquers All"; and 3. "The Decisiveness of Death." The first discourse is on the occasion of a confessional service; the second, on the occasion of a wedding;

¹ *Crucial Situations*, p. 9.

² *Postscript*, p. 545.

³ *Ibid.*

and the third, at the side of a grave. It is really the first of these which represents the transition to the Christian mode of life. The second discourse deals with the ethical life and, as in the case of Judge William in *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*, from the point of view of marriage. The third evokes the earnest thought of death, and is calculated to rouse the reader from the aesthetic mode of life to the realities of the ethical and religious life. "For when conceived in earnestness death gives energy to live as nothing else does; . . . to the earnest man the thought of death gives the right impetus to life and the right goal to which he directs his speed."⁴

According to Kierkegaard the natural beginning of all fear of God is wonder.⁵ He refers to Spinoza, the Jewish thinker, "who believed that wonder was characteristic of the Jewish people, that this wonder, in a peculiar manner, overleaped the *intervening causes* to arrive at God."⁶ But Kierkegaard suggests that wonder is not peculiar to the ancient Jews, it belongs essentially to *youth*, and even in manhood when the intervening causes appear, one dares not forget wonder completely.⁷ God alone is the everlasting object of wonder, and man alone is able to halt the wonder.⁸ The relationship of wonder and the fear of God is further developed in the discourse, "What It Means to Seek God." Since this discourse represents the transition to the Christian mode of life, we shall consider it at length. First the discourse speaks of the stillness in which religiosity is born and nourished.⁹ This must not be confused with a physical stillness, nor limited to church and sanctuary. It is a stillness which is of a peculiarly private nature. No man can give it to another, nor can anyone take it away from him. He who possesses it has severed his roots from the temporal and relative world, and possesses the temporal as one who possesses it not.¹⁰ This stillness is the stillness in which every man becomes guilty before God. It

⁴ *Crucial Situations*, pp. 90-91. ⁵ *Papirer*, V A 25.

⁶ *Edifying Discourses*, III, p. 83. Italics mine. ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63. ⁹ *Crucial Situations*, pp. 2-9. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

arises as soon as a man is face to face with God and must give an account of his life. It is "God's voice of judgment in solitude."¹¹ The true seeker after God is the penitent who seeks him in the confession of sins.

The thesis of the discourse is: "*No man can see God without purity and no man can know God without becoming a sinner.*"¹² The two clauses are complementary, for "precisely the purest of heart will be the most willing to apprehend his own guilt most profoundly."¹³ *What then does it mean to seek God?*

1. When the seeker assumes that he can contribute *nothing* toward finding God, his attitude is that of wishing.¹⁴ Hence this religiosity is characterized by the wish and may be determined as pertaining to the aesthetic mode of life. When the wish is associated with God as the highest and the unknown good, wonder is present. Kierkegaard regards the wonder of this type of religiosity as the sense of the immediate consciousness of God. Wonder finds its expression in worship. "Wonder is an ambiguous state of the soul, containing both fear and bliss. The worship is therefore mingled with fear and happiness. *Even the most purified and rational worship of God is happiness in fear and trembling, confidence in deadly peril, frankness in the consciousness of sin.*"¹⁵

The state of wonder which corresponds to the unknown is indeterminable; it may be abhorrent, ludicrous, confused, and childish. This immediate consciousness of God is beautifully described in a lyrical passage in which Kierkegaard uses as an example the primitive pagan who in the presence of the phenomena of nature expresses his wonder in worship.

"When the forest darkens in the evening hour and the moon loses itself among the trees, when the natural magic of the forest seizes its prey, and the pagan suddenly sees a wonder, a miracle of phosphorescence that mystifies him, then he sees the unknown, and expresses his wonder in

¹¹ *Ibid.* ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 9. ¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12 ff. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Italics mine.

worship. When the gnarled tree-trunk creates the illusion of a figure unfamiliar to him resembling a human being, and yet, to his surprise, resembling it only in supernatural proportions, then he pauses and worships. When he sees a track in the desert which no man has made, nor any creature known to him, when the power of solitude impregnates his soul with wonder, then he sees by this sign that the unknown has been here, and he worships. When the sea lies deep and still, inexplicable, when the wondering mind gazes dizzily down into its depths until the unknown seems rising up to meet it, when the breakers roll monotonously over the beach, overwhelming the soul with the power of the monotonous, when the rushes whisper in the wind and again whisper, and therefore must wish to confide something to the listener—then he worships.”¹⁶

Kierkegaard significantly adds: “If the passion of wonder defines itself, its highest expression is that God is the inexplicable whole of existence, as sensed by the imagination in the least and the greatest everywhere.”¹⁷

The consciousness described above is not peculiar to paganism or to antiquity. According to Kierkegaard, “That which was once the content of the pagan consciousness returns again and again in each generation, and not until it has been lived through and set aside does that which was once idolatry become reduced to a carefree state of existence in the innocence of poesy.”¹⁸

2. When the seeker after God is not merely wishing but is supposed to contribute *something* toward finding that which he seeks, his attitude is that of striving. This involves that the immediate relationship of wonder is broken, for striving is interposed as a way of finding God, while for the wishing individual there was no way. Since the seeker is only supposed to be able to contribute something (not everything), the breach with the immediate relationship is not a complete rupture. Since the striving is directed toward the unknown, toward God, wonder is again present and is expressed in worship. This worship may have the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

characteristics of the pagan wonder; it may express itself in the abhorrent, the ludicrous, the confused, and the childish.¹⁹

The two modes of wonder and of worship mentioned thus far are according to Kierkegaard characteristic of early youth. Both modes embrace the superstitious and the childish.

3. When the seeker is supposed to contribute *everything* toward finding that which he seeks, the enchantment of wonder is over. There is nothing left to wonder about. Reason has consumed the wonder. The immediate relationship is completely broken, and the break is characterized by despair.²⁰ This experience is, according to Kierkegaard, characteristic of the transition from youth to manhood²¹ when a person takes leave of his youth and suddenly discovers that he is "an eternity old." "There was a time when man weary of wonder, weary of striving, turned away from externals, and found that there was no object of wonder, that the unknown was nothing, and wonder a deception. And what was once the content of life returns in each successive generation. If anyone would appear wise by saying that these are ghosts of the past, left behind us centuries ago: in life this is not so."²²

While the immediate and semi-immediate experiences of wonder and worship which belong to youth are destined to be destroyed in maturity, these experiences nevertheless have a value, since they are the presuppositions of a deeper and truer religious experience. The most glorious knowledge, the happiest upbringing, are merely presuppositions, but the danger is always to increase the presuppositions like a miser who heaps up money without putting it to use.²³ The destruction of the immediate consciousness

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 15. ²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.

²¹ David F. Swenson in *Thoughts on Crucial Situations in Human Life* translates "Ungdommens Aarskifte" into "springtime of youth." As Kierkegaard uses the term it signifies "the turning of the year" and refers to the transition from youth to maturity, when a person takes leave of his youth and becomes "an eternity old."

²² *Crucial Situations*, pp. 16-17. ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

of God with its wonder is the presupposition for a truer religious relationship. It is the first step in the transition to a spiritual religiosity. In the words of Emmanuel Hirsch, "Die Todesstunde der ersten Verwunderung ist die Geburtsstunde der zweiten, der wahren Verwunderung, die Todesstunde der unmittelbaren Religiösität die Geburtsstunde der geisthaften Religiösität."²⁴ ("The death hour of the first wonder is the birth hour of the second and true wonder; the death hour of the immediate religiosity is the birth hour of the spiritual religiosity.") When the first wonder with its immediate consciousness of God has been destroyed, the second wonder appears when the seeker suddenly discovers that he has what he wished and strove for, and that "the misfortune is that he stands and loses it. . . . But that the thing sought is given, that it is in the possession of him who stands there and loses it in his misunderstanding: this arouses the wonder of the whole man."²⁵ The new religious consciousness corresponds to what Kierkegaard in his philosophical writings termed religion A, or the religiosity of immanence. In the new religious consciousness wonder is far more profound than in the naive and immediate consciousness of God. The second wonder changes the seeker, for he no longer seeks for the place where God is. Now he has discovered that God is within himself, and that he is to be changed so that he may truly become the place suitable for the dwelling of God. The second wonder, like the first is defined as an ambiguous passion, and it is characterized by fear and bliss, fear because God of whom reason said that he did not exist, was so near that one could neither move nor rest without being in him; happiness because the darkest prison and greatest solitude could not shut out God.²⁶

According to Kierkegaard the God-relationship is not dependent upon a man's natural power or wisdom. "The mightiest is he who is most profoundly powerless . . . the strongest is he who rightly folds his hands."²⁷ It is the fear

²⁴ Emmanuel Hirsch, *Kierkegaardstudien*, II, p. 766.

²⁵ *Crucial Situations*, p. 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

and the happiness associated with the wonder which determine the strength of the God-relationship.²⁸ In one of the *Christian Discourses*²⁹ we find a reference to worship. Worship is regarded as the maximum expression of man's God-relationship. Worship is akin to admiration. In admiration we find two factors. First the admirer has the sense of a relationship to something superior, then he joyfully yields himself to this superiority. The admirer is not overcome by this sense of superiority. He has the sense of being "happily and indescribably liberated from all pressure of superiority." There is therefore a sense of triumph in admiration. In admiration a man loses himself in that which is greater. In worship a man feels God's infinite superiority over against his own nothingness, and he loses himself blissfully in God. The weaker the worshiper is in relation to the object of his worship, the more worship. This weakness of his is something like a "love secret with God." In worship the individual becomes weak in relation to the object of his worship. According to the *Postscript*³⁰ the significance of worship lies in the fact that God becomes absolutely all for the worshiper and that it is the worshiper who expresses this distinction in his own existence.

The wonder which is the expression of the God-relationship one man cannot learn from another; it is only learned when a man is alone with the omnipresent God.³¹ Therefore intellectual proofs will never lead a man to God, for the man who seeks to prove the existence of God "does not deal with God, but considers something about God."³² His attitude to God is purely objective. Then follow these significant words: "One learns wonder from a child and fear from a man, which is a helpful preparation, since fear surely comes with God when He comes and makes all proof superfluous."³³

The characteristics of the second God-relationship are:

1. God is found within the human personality and not in a

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁹ *Christian Discourses*, pp. 136-137.

³⁰ *Postscript*, p. 369.

³¹ *Crucial Situations*, pp. 21, 22.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 21. Italics mine.

place exterior to the seeker. 2. The God-relationship involves that the seeker himself is changed. This, according to Kierkegaard, is essential in every true religious relationship. 3. The God-relationship is surrounded by a sense of fear and happiness in wonder which expresses itself in worship.

The transition from the first to the second wonder was due to the interposition of reason which destroyed everything that belonged to the first wonder. The first wonder was superstitious and therefore perishable. Thus reason clears the ground for the true wonder.³⁴ A notation from the *Papers* of Kierkegaard is more direct in its expression of this last thought.

"Wonder is the natural beginning for the fear of God. As long as wonder is without reflection it is abandoned to the most ludicrous. . . . As soon as reflection begins, wonder is purified. But now appears the tremendous deception of reason, a deception just as foolish as superstitious: that reflection shall remove wonder. This is not the case. Reflection removes all those things which are of man's own invention, and which superstition could not explain. But at this point one arrives at the true decision, where the absolute wonder corresponds to the true divine. This is something reason had not thought of. First at this point does faith begin."³⁵

The transition from the religiosity of immanence to Christianity is characterized by the consciousness of sin. "When the thing sought is assumed to be given, seeking for it signifies that the seeker *himself is changed*, so that he becomes the place where the object of his search may in truth exist."³⁶ But the object of his search was lost, and "the loss dates back to the distant past."³⁷ The seeker is indeed changed, but now he is changed from having been the place where God dwelt, and the condition in which he now lives is called sin. "Now there is no wonder, no ambiguity! When the soul apprehends this, its condition is fear and

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22. ³⁵ *Papirer*, v A 25. Translation mine.

³⁶ *Crucial Situations*, p. 23. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

trembling in the consciousness of guilt.³⁸ If we ask how the seeker for God arrives at this new consciousness, the answer is: A man becomes a sinner when he is alone and silent before God.³⁹ No man can learn to know God without becoming a sinner. When the individual is in the presence of God he learns, not something *about* sin in general, but he learns that he, himself is a sinner. "He will feel in himself the essential magnitude of sin."⁴⁰ The consciousness of sin is not merely an awareness of particular sins and transgressions, it is "an understanding before God of the continuity of sin in itself . . . an unfathomable continuity."⁴¹ The consciousness of sin must not be confused with an objective knowledge of sin. As soon as a person thinks in terms of the sinfulness of the human race, and not of his own sinfulness, he escapes from the reality of sin.⁴² The consciousness of sin is something so personal that one person cannot learn it from another. All the eloquence in the world cannot convict a man of sin. God alone can do that.⁴³ The discourse ends in the confession of sin. It does not deal with the various Christian categories, but only with the transition to the Christian mode of life through the consciousness of sin.

Kierkegaard presented the transition from the religiosity of aesthetic immediacy and of immanence to Christianity. The seeker after God who had realized that God was to be found within him rather than in some external place, all of a sudden discovered that he had lost God. Sin had intervened and destroyed his relationship to God. Now, to know God implied that the knower became a sinner.

The long confessional address, "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing," which according to Geismar⁴⁴ is among the most profound of Kierkegaard's writings, deals with remorse and repentance. The presupposition of the discourse is that sin has intervened in the relationship be-

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24, 28, 29, 30, 34.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 33.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 29, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, v, p. 59.

tween God and man, and that it has brought about a delay, a halt, a break, a deception, and a sense of perdition in man's consciousness.⁴⁵ The discourse is not concerned with an objective presentation of repentance, but it is calculated to make the reader self-active so that he may soberly recognize himself in the presence of God. First there is a brief description of the difference between man and the rest of creation. The words of Ecclesiastes⁴⁶ "For everything there is a season," hold true of all of creation except man. The words apply to the temporal world, to plant and animal life, as well as to the *temporal* aspects of human life with its natural changes from childhood to old age. For the natural changes in human life belong to the realm of the temporal.

"The animal also changes with the years. When it is older it has other desires than it had at an earlier age. At certain times it, too, has its happiness in life, and at other times it must endure hardship. Yes, when late autumn comes, even the flower can speak the wisdom of the years and say with truthfulness, 'All has its time, there is "a time to be born and a time to die"; there is a time to jest light-heartedly in the spring breeze and a time to break under the autumn storm.' . . . Yes the animal, too, when it has lived its time may speak the wisdom of the years and say with truth, 'All has its time. There is a time to leap with joy, and a time to drag oneself along the earth; there is a time to waken early, and a time to sleep long; there is a time to run with the herd, and a time to go apart to die.' . . . And, in case you should say to the flower, 'Is there, then, nothing more to tell?' then it will answer you, 'No, when the flower is dead, the story is over.' "⁴⁷

Man is different from the rest of creation. Under all circumstances and at all times there is something eternal in man. "God made everything beautiful in its time; also he has set eternity in their heart."⁴⁸ The eternal is suitable for

⁴⁵ *Samlede Værker*, VIII, p. 119. Cf. *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, translated by Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Chapter 3:1. ⁴⁷ *Purity of Heart*, pp. 4-5. ⁴⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:11.

all occasions and is not subject to change. If there is something eternal in man, then there is something which always has its time, something which always should be done, e.g., we are always to give thanks to God. When this is not done the requirement to express the eternal reappears, but now the requirement is to express the eternal by means of repentance. Thus repentance and remorse become expressions of the eternal in man. Repentance and remorse always have their time, whether it be in youth or in old age. And at the same time there is also a sense in which repentance has its particular time, for repentance is always at the eleventh hour. To repent at any other time is to repent in a temporal sense. The eleventh hour is the designation for the occasion when a man renders his account to God, when everything is as serious and solemn as in the hour of death.⁴⁹

Repentance also has its time, but not in a temporal sense so that it should be confined to certain periods in life, such as childhood, youth, or old age. "It will not come and disappear as a whim or as a surprise."⁵⁰ In order that repentance may become edifying and bring forth a new life, it must be the action of a collected mind. Otherwise it will only be like the occasion of a funeral where the chief mourner is a melancholy mood. Repentance shall have its time, but in freedom and with the emphasis of eternity. From the point of view of eternity repentance must take place instantaneously, but instantaneously must not be understood in the sense of "suddenly." Man lives in temporal dimensions, and requests a little postponement, not in order to avoid repentance, but that he might be properly prepared. There is a sudden repentance which would gather all the bitterness of remorse in one single effort, and thus be through with it. This is not true repentance but an escape from the reality of guilt. True repentance is not something which declines with the passing years, nor is it outgrown, for it is a silent daily concern. The sense of repentance and remorse should so deepen and increase in

⁴⁹ *Purity of Heart*, pp. 6, 9-13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

inwardness that even the punishment and the consequences of sin may become redemptive.⁵¹

He who confesses his sins before God is seized by the solemnity of silence, but this silence is no melancholy mood; it possesses all the seriousness of eternity. "The person making the confession is not like a servant that gives an account to his lord for the management which is given over to him because the lord could not manage all or be present at all places. The all-knowing One was present at each instant for which reckoning shall be made in the account. The account of what is done is not made for the lord's sake but for the servant's sake who must even render account of how he used the very moment of rendering the account. Nor is the person confessing like one that confides in a friend to whom sooner or later he reveals things that the friend did not previously know. The all-knowing One does not get to know something about the maker of the confession, rather the maker of the confession gets to know about himself."⁵²

In the confession the confessing sinner does not impart new information to the Lord, but he finds out about himself. He sees himself in the presence of God. The confession is not for God's sake but for the sinner's sake. This view of confession is similar to Kierkegaard's view of prayer. A superficial interpretation may regard prayer as a useless task, since man's prayer cannot change the unchangeable God. The true explanation is that prayer does not change God, but it changes the man who prays.⁵³

In this chapter we have dealt with the transition to the Christian religiosity as it is presented in the religious discourses of Kierkegaard. The entrance into a Christian mode of life is always and only through the consciousness of sin, repentance, and confession. In the following chapters we shall deal with the decisive Christian categories and the Christian life.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.* Cf. *supra*, pp. 141-142.

CHAPTER X

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGIOSITY

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN—THE PARADOX OF FAITH



The concept by which Christianity distinguishes itself most decisively from paganism is the concept of sin, the doctrine of sin; and therefore Christianity also assumes quite consistently that neither paganism nor the natural man knows what sin is; yea, it assumes that there must be a revelation from God to make manifest what sin is.¹



In dealing more specifically with Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity, we shall first consider what might be termed the distinctive Christian categories, namely the consciousness of sin and the "paradox."

In the writings of Kierkegaard we find a repeated emphasis upon the qualitative difference between God and man.² This absolute difference is first of all due to the fact that God is infinite and eternal and man is a particular existing creature.³ Furthermore, the consciousness of sin accentuates the qualitative difference, for there is nothing in which man is so different from God as in the fact that he is a sinner. As a sinner man is separated from God by a yawning qualitative abyss.⁴ God cannot be comprehended in the world of creation. Even in the revelation of Himself He is obscure, "like a secret we are unable to utter."⁵ He is a *deus absconditus*. God is in heaven and infinitely exalted, and at the same time He is nearer to us than the men with whom we associate in daily life. This is the paradox of God's distance and nearness.⁶

¹ *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 144.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 192, 199, 207, 209; *Training in Christianity*, pp. 67, 125.

³ *Postscript*, p. 195. * *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 99.

⁵ *Papirer*, IV C 1; cf. VII 1 A 142. ⁶ *Christian Discourses*, pp. 174-175.

God is Love. This is the central thought in Kierkegaard's conception of God. Love as a predicate of God is a noun. All other designations are mere adjectives.⁷ God's love is regarded as the support of the whole of existence,⁸ but it is revealed unto men in the person of Jesus Christ, who is our Savior and Atoner.⁹ Kierkegaard holds that there is a qualitative abyss between God and man, yet in Christianity God has made Himself man. In His infinite love and compassion God humbles Himself, takes the form of a servant, suffers every day of His life. But one thing love cannot do. It cannot remove the offense to the logical intellect that resides in the paradox. Hence Christ says, "Blessed is he who shall not be offended at me."¹⁰ "He who is not offended worships in faith. But to worship (which is the expression of faith) is to express the consciousness that the infinite yawning abyss of quality is fixed between them [i.e. between God and man]."¹¹

Within the religiosity of immanence, subjectivity is regarded as the truth, that is, the individual subject is regarded as potentially possessing the truth, and the truth because of its objective uncertainty becomes a paradox. The eternal and essential truth, i.e., ethico-religious truth or truth which relates itself to existence, is *not in itself a paradox*, but it becomes paradoxical through its relationship to an existing individual.¹²

The Christian religiosity posits a conjunction within truth itself. The paradox consists in that the eternal essential truth is put in juxtaposition with existence.¹³ Christianity repels by virtue of the absurd, and the absurd is precisely that the eternal truth has come into being at a particular moment of time. God has been born and has grown up in the person of one single individual man "who looked like other men, spoke like them, followed their habits and customs."¹⁴ Whether this particular individual

⁷ *Papirer*, II A 418. ⁸ *Works of Love*, p. 245.

⁹ *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 17-28; *Works of Love*, p. 5; *Christian Discourses*, pp. 287 f., 368.

¹⁰ *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 207. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹² *Postscript*, pp. 183, 184. ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 187. ¹⁴ *The Journals*, No. 417.

is a servant or an emperor is insignificant for it is no more adequate for God to be a king than a beggar.¹⁵ To later generations it is easier to imagine that he was God for they do not see him with their physical eyes. To them the offense is that he adopted the habit and mind of a particular age. The contemporaries no doubt faced the more difficult paradox, for "to witness such a paradox is a very serious matter."¹⁶ When Kierkegaard speaks of the Christian Paradox he does not mean a fantastic speculation about the unity of God and man, but an individual man who is God,¹⁷ a paradox which can never be reduced to a common syllogism.¹⁸

Speculative philosophy may of course assert that viewed eternally, divinely, and theocentrically there is no paradox. Over against such a position Kierkegaard justly maintains that an existing individual has no means of verifying whether such a philosophic position is right or wrong, for he is an *existing* individual and in no position to contemplate the paradox eternally, divinely, or theocentrically.¹⁹ The God-man is the absolute paradox which cannot be comprehended by the understanding. The only understanding in this respect consists in a comprehension that this is something which cannot be understood. In this connection Kierkegaard presents a significant supposition: Suppose that Christianity is intentionally a mystery, and that this is its significant characteristic, not a theatrical mystery which is revealed in the fifth act of the play, but a genuine mystery. Suppose Christianity was never meant to be understood—suppose it accentuates existence "so decisively that the individual becomes a sinner," and suppose that after all it was a blessed thing in the critical situation of "the extreme press of existence" to relate oneself to this mystery without understanding, but simply as a believer.²⁰

How does the individual religiously appropriate the Paradox? Kierkegaard answers this question by defining Christian faith as "immediacy after reflection" and as "con-

¹⁵ *Postscript*, p. 528.

¹⁶ *The Journals*, No. 417.

¹⁷ *Training in Christianity*, p. 122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁹ *Postscript*, p. 190.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

temporaneity with Christ." The first term describes faith apart from its object, the second in relationship to the object.

Faith is immediacy after reflection. The immediate consciousness of God has, according to Kierkegaard, nothing to do with faith. He complains that what Schleiermacher calls "religion" and certain Hegelian dogmaticians call "faith" is nothing but the first immediacy (the unreflected spontaneous awareness of God).²¹ In this way faith comes into the rather cheap company of feeling, mood, and idiosyncrasy.²²

Kierkegaard maintains that faith in the Christian sense is neither continuous with rational belief nor to be identified with a spontaneous awareness of God. Christian faith is "the second immediacy"²³ or "immediacy after reflection."²⁴ By the term immediacy after reflection he means exactly what he formerly had called "repetition,"²⁵ namely the restoration of the personality to its pristine integrity. However, the immediate consciousness of God must be completely destroyed by the consciousness of sin before there can be any question of a second immediacy of God. Only when the individual has found himself guilty before God can he arrive at faith and the mystic union with God in Christ.²⁶ The "reflection" is here the process by which the consciousness of sin completely destroys every possibility of finding God in the immediate experience of life.

Faith is not regarded as a form of cognition. It is not an intellectual observation but an expression of the will.²⁷ There is in Kierkegaard's concept of faith as well as in his concept of choice a pronounced tendency toward voluntarism. At the same time Kierkegaard maintains that faith and the new immediacy with God is a divine gift. Faith is a transcendent point of departure.²⁸

*Faith is contemporaneity with Christ.*²⁹ Every contemporary disciple of Christ, in the chronological sense of the

²¹ *The Journals*, No. 78. ²² *Fear and Trembling*, p. 104.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 125. ²⁴ *Papirer*, VIII A 650, p. 298. ²⁵ *Supra*, pp. 70-73.

²⁶ *Papirer*, V A 6, 8, 10; V B 119:16. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, IV B 87:2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII A 649 f., 663. ²⁹ *Philosophical Fragments*, pp. 44-58, 74-93.

word "contemporary," as well as every later disciple, has a historical point of departure as the basis for his eternal happiness. The contemporary disciple of Christ could easily enough gather adequate historical information about Christ, but such information, according to Kierkegaard, could have nothing but historical significance. If the historical information is regarded as "the swaddling-clothes of eternity,"³⁰ if the child born in an inn and laid in a manger is God, the historical moment becomes a point of departure for the eternal, and the paradox presents itself.³¹ For no ordinary knowledge can comprehend that the eternal is the historical.³² This is absurd, since the historical belongs within the stream of time. Kierkegaard therefore concludes that no one becomes a believer by being an eyewitness or by means of historical knowledge. Reason must step aside, and then the individual receives the condition for becoming a disciple, namely faith, from God himself.³³

*Faith is the miracle.*³⁴

What Kierkegaard terms contemporaneity with Christ is not a historical or immediate contemporaneity, for God cannot be immediately known. It is not arrived at through a critical study of the historical sources, nor is it the sensing of a contemporary spirit. It is impossible to be an immediate contemporary of Christ.³⁵ Only the believer, the non-immediate contemporary, knows the Teacher, for he alone has received the required condition for a spiritual and true contemporaneity, namely, faith.³⁶ He does not see through the eyes of another, but with the eyes of faith. He is a contemporary in the *autopsy of faith*, and in this autopsy every noncontemporary (in the immediate sense of the word) becomes a contemporary.³⁷ The relationship of the believer who lived contemporary with Christ in the immediate sense, and those who became believers in a later generation is that the later believers believe by means of the testimony of the contemporary disciple (in the imme-

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 56.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 85.

diate sense of the word), but also by *virtue* of the condition, namely, faith, which God Himself bestows upon him.³⁸ From the point of view of religious education the historical testimony furnishes the occasion for becoming a believer, but the condition itself is transcendental.³⁹ "Only one who receives the condition from God is a believer."⁴⁰

According to Kierkegaard *the consciousness of sin is the conditio sine qua non of becoming a Christian*. The one and only entrance into Christianity is through the consciousness of sin. To become a Christian presupposes the consciousness of oneself as a sinner,⁴¹ and the desire to become a Christian for any other reason is not only madness, but a crime of *lèse-majesté*, or high treason, against Christianity.⁴²

"Christianity shall be presented in this manner: If it is not the consciousness of sin that drives a person, he must be mad if he enters into relationship with Christianity. One must make an end to all the coddling nonsense of Christianity as satisfying the deepest longings, etc. No, only the struggle and distress of the anxious conscience can help a man in daring to have to do with Christianity. Otherwise Christianity causes and shall cause offense."⁴³ To place the emphasis upon anything else than the consciousness of sin and still call it Christianity is to take Christ in vain,⁴⁴ to water down Christianity and to transform it into sentimentality.⁴⁵ Only the consciousness of sin binds a man to Christianity, and he who is not thus bound is not bound to Christianity.⁴⁶

The concept of sin distinguishes Christianity from every form of paganism. For Christianity assumes that there must be a revelation from God to make clear what sin is, and that it does not consist in that man has not understood what is right, but in that he will not understand it, and

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88. ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴¹ *Training in Christianity*, p. 155; *Papirer*, V A 6, 7, 10, 16.

⁴² *Papirer*, IX A 414; *Training in Christianity*, pp. 71-72.

⁴³ *Papirer*, X 1 A 133. Translation mine. ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, IX A 310. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

that he will not do the right.⁴⁷ Man is not born a sinner, in the sense that he is supposed to have been a sinner prior to his birth, but by coming into existence he becomes a sinner.⁴⁸ Kierkegaard accepts the dogma that original or inherited sin is guilt. He calls attention to the paradoxical nature of the dogma and points out⁴⁹ that the dogma is formed by two qualitatively different categories, "to inherit" which is a biological category and "guilt" which is an ethical category.

Kierkegaard refers to the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church, and in particular to the *Smalcald Articles*, III, 1.3, which read: "*peccatum haereditarium tam profunda et tetra est corruptio naturae, ut nullius hominis ratione intelligi possit, sed ex scripturae patefactione agnoscenda et credenda sit.*"⁵⁰ He points out that the article does not present an appeal to reason, but is an expression of a pious feeling which assumes the part of an accuser, who, with the fanaticism of a girl in love, is concerned only with making sin and our participation in sin more and more abominable.⁵¹

Sin cannot be comprehended by human understanding. It belongs under the category of a qualitative leap.⁵² Sin is its own presupposition, and the only possible account of its origin is: Sin entered into the world through sin.⁵³ While this statement has a special reference to Adam and the first sin, it is equally true in the life of every individual. For sin has the quality of transcendence. Through a crisis sin enters into the life of the individual.⁵⁴ One may, of course, object that this is to predicate a thing by its own term, but this is precisely due to the fact that sin is inexplicable. How sin entered into the world a man will only understand from his own personal experience.⁵⁵ According

⁴⁷ *Sickness Unto Death*, pp. 144, 153, 155, 156; *Papirer*, X 2 A 473.

⁴⁸ *Postscript*, p. 186. ⁴⁹ *The Journals*, No. 1061.

⁵⁰ "Inherited sin is so profound and detestable a corruption in human nature that it cannot be comprehended by human understanding, but must be known and believed from the revelation of the Scriptures."

⁵¹ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 24. ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 45. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

to Kierkegaard every man has had a state of innocence analogous to Adam's. "As Adam lost innocence by guilt, so does every man lose it. If it was not by guilt he lost it, neither was it innocence he lost; and if he was not innocent before he became guilty, he never became guilty."⁵⁶ He holds that to deny that every man has a state of innocence is to abolish all thinking since it would place Adam in a category by himself, apart from the race.⁵⁷

While Kierkegaard accepts the Christian dogma of inherited sin, he gives it his own peculiar interpretation. The fall of man (*Sündenfall*) has special reference to Adam, but it is also regarded as an *actus perpetuus*. Through the qualitative leap which constituted the first sin Adam brought the first sin into the world. Whether there be a thousand Adams or merely one is entirely insignificant.⁵⁸ Adam as well as every other individual is at the same time himself and the race.⁵⁹ The reproduction of sin in the race is only an expression for its continuity in the human race.⁶⁰

Only the sense of having brought upon oneself a guilt due to personal sin can issue in true repentance. "It is quite true that every man can say with profound seriousness that he was born in misery and his mother conceived him in sin; but really he can only sorrow rightly over it when he himself has brought sin into the world and brought all this upon himself, for it is a contradiction to sorrow *aesthetically* over *sinfulness*."⁶¹

Every sin is *before God*, and it is this which properly makes man guilty before God and distinguishes the quality of sin.⁶² According to Kierkegaard the measure for the self is "that in the face of which it is a self."⁶³ Therefore the self acquires a new quality and meaning when it is a self in the sight of God, or when God becomes the measure of the self.⁶⁴

"A self face to face with Christ is a self potentiated by . . . the prodigious emphasis that God also for the sake of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 51, 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 30-31.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶² *Sickness Unto Death*, p. 129.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

this self let himself be born, become man, suffered and died.... A self is qualitatively what its measure is. That Christ is the measure is on God's part attested as the expression for the immense reality a self possesses; for it is true for the first time in Christ that God is man's goal and measure."⁶⁵ Kierkegaard adds significantly, "But the more self, the more intense the sin."⁶⁶

Kierkegaard maintains that from the Christian point of view sin lies in the will, not in the intellect. Sin is further characterized as disobedience.⁶⁷ The emphasis is never upon the particular acts of sin, but on the continuity of sin.⁶⁸ The sinner is so thoroughly in the power of sin that he is blinded by its power. Instead of possessing essential continuity with the eternal, he has the continuity of sin. The growth of sin is not to be measured quantitatively by regarding every new sin as an increase of sin. Sin grows every instant one does not get out of it, and this continuity in sin is a worse sin than the particular sins. The particular sins do not constitute the continuation of sin, but they are the *expression* for the continuation of sin. "*In the particular new sins the momentum of sin merely becomes more observable.*"⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, who was familiar with Schlegel and Tieck's German translation of Shakespeare, points out⁷⁰ that a similar view of sin is expressed in Macbeth (Act III, scene 2), "Sündentsprossne Werke erlangen nur durch Sünde Kraft und Stärke." ("Works sprung from sin receive alone from sin their strength and power.") We retain the German translation since it is much more expressive of what Kierkegaard meant than the English original which reads, "Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill." Of course, such a view of sin is contrary to the modern functional conception of sin.

Christianity begins with the doctrine of sin, and the category of sin is the category of the individual.⁷¹ "Sin . . . does not gather men together in a common concept, into a

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 145, 153 f., 155.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 156, 159, 163, 177.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173. Italics mine.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 195, 197, 200.

society or a partnership . . . but it splits men into individuals and holds every individual fast as a sinner."⁷² It is evident that Kierkegaard is not concerned with social sins.

Sin is regarded as neither necessary nor accidental. To regard sin as a necessity is a contradiction. To say that it is due to a *liberum arbitrium*, which is indifferent to good and evil, is to render every explanation impossible.⁷³ Freedom does not consist in being equally able to choose good and evil. Good and evil are not regarded as determinants of freedom but derivatives.⁷⁴ First, "when sin is posited in the particular individual by the qualitative leap, the distinction is then posited between good and evil."⁷⁵ Bohlin⁷⁶ points out the difference between Kant's and Kierkegaard's conception of freedom. For Kant the result of the ethical striving of the will is a progression toward ethical perfection. For Kierkegaard the result of the same striving is a consciousness of guilt which makes it apparent that the salvation resulting in a new life must come through a spiritual power which is greater than man's.

In Kierkegaard's works are numerous references to the forgiveness of sin, but the most illuminating passages which deal with the subject are found in his journals. Throughout his whole life the great difficulty was to arrive at a personal sense of having been forgiven. "The crux of the forgiveness of sin" was to make it a reality in this life.⁷⁷ In 1846, at the age of thirty-three he wrote: "The forgiveness of sins cannot be such that with one blow God wipes out all guilt, obliterates all its consequences. Such a desire is only a worldly longing which does not rightly know what guilt is. It is only the *guilt* which is forgiven, the forgiveness of sin is not more. It does not mean to become a new man under happier circumstances, but to become a new man in the consoling assurance that the guilt is forgiven, even though the consequences of all sin remain. The

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 194. ⁷³ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 100; *Papirer*, IV A 12.

⁷⁴ *Papirer*, V B 56:2. ⁷⁵ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 100.

⁷⁶ Torsten Bohlin, *Søren Kierkegaard, mannen och verket* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1939), p. 226.

⁷⁷ *The Journals*, No. 581.

forgiveness of sin must not be a scheme whereby a man who has tried his hand at many things ends by wishing to be a new man, and hopes to stumble through with the help of the forgiveness of sins. No, only the man who has understood that guilt is something absolutely different and far more terrible than the consequences of sin (looked upon as misfortune, suffering), he alone repents . . .”⁷⁸

The guilt of sin is here regarded as something much more terrible than the consequences of sin. The divine forgiveness applies to the removal of guilt and its punishment. The consequences in this life remain the same.

Two years later, during Easter week, 1848, Kierkegaard passed through a religious crisis. He had not altered his view on forgiveness, but he was struggling to arrive at an assurance that his sins were forgiven by God. He wrote: “To be sure, I believe in the forgiveness of sins, but I understand it as hitherto, that I must bear my punishment all my life of remaining in the painful prison of my isolation, in a profound sense cut off from communication with other men—nevertheless softened by the thought that God has forgiven me. I cannot as yet attain to such a faith as to believe (I cannot as yet attain to such a freedom of belief as to believe) that painful memory away. But believing I arm myself against the despair, bearing the pain and punishment of self-isolation.”⁷⁹

The “painful prison of isolation” is a reference to his melancholy, something which made him “the exception,” and which prevented him from marrying. It was the melancholy that drove him into self-isolation. There is, however, in this passage a gleam of the possibility of entering still further into the religious experience of forgiveness. This is also brought out in the *Journal* entry immediately following,⁸⁰ which states that a miracle took place when Christ said to the paralytic, “Thy sins are forgiven thee” and which speaks of the “miraculous boldness of faith,” which is necessary in order to believe that sin is entirely forgotten, and to such an extent that even the memory of

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 606.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, No. 749.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 750.

its anguish has disappeared. Not long afterwards he wrote that "belief in the forgiveness of sins means to believe that here in time the sin is forgotten by God."⁸¹ But, to believe that God actually had forgotten his sins required, according to Kierkegaard, so great a courage that it would hardly be realized in the experience of more than ten persons in each generation.⁸²

To Kierkegaard the preaching of the forgiveness of sin was the very attraction of Christianity—"the splendour without equal"—and the dialect by which Christianity is recognized. Forgiveness of sin must not be regarded as the forgiveness of mere individual sins; it is the forgiveness of the totality of sin and of sin as a state of continuity. To experience the forgiveness of sin is to become a new man.

The entries in Kierkegaard's *Journals* which deal with the forgiveness of sin indicate a strong faith in divine forgiveness. At the same time they also indicate Kierkegaard's inability to arrive at a sense of release, a release which he himself no doubt regarded as the ultimate goal in this respect.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, No. 753.

⁸² *Papirer*, VIII 1 A 663.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

According to the New Testament, Christianity is the deepest wound that can be inflicted upon a man . . . and now the modern clergyman is trained in the art of introducing Christianity in such a way that it signifies nothing, and when he is perfect in that he is a paragon.¹

IN his philosophical writings Kierkegaard used several terms to designate the transition from the aesthetic to the religious sphere of life, such as "the infinite double moment"² (namely resignation and faith) and "repetition."³ The religious life itself was described as "inwardness,"⁴ "immediacy after reflection,"⁵ and "contemporaneity with Christ."⁶

Religiously the transition to Christianity is expressed in the sentence, "It is the Spirit which giveth life."⁷ To be made alive by the Holy Spirit involves more than an intensification of one's former life, it is the bestowal of a new life which is neither a *direct* increment of man's natural life nor *immediately* continuous with it.⁸ Death stands as the intervening factor. To die unto the world is the unconditional existential determinant of Christianity. Dying from the world is the first and last word of Christianity strictly understood, and it was expressed in actual life by the early Christians.⁹ First death to every merely earthly hope and every merely human confidence,¹⁰ then the new life.¹¹

By nature man is desirous of a temporal happiness. He

¹ *The Journals*, No. 1805. ² *Supra*, pp. 66-67.

³ *Supra*, pp. 70-73. ⁴ *Supra*, p. 116. ⁵ *Supra*, pp. 160-161.

⁶ *Supra*, pp. 161-162.

⁷ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 95. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 147. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 99. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

prefers to be tranquilized and comforted by the dreams of the temporal rather than risk the leap that brings him into an absolute relationship with God. If a man is to enter into a religious relationship with God, he must let go of probability¹² and break completely with the temporal world. This does not mean that the religious man becomes an ascetic who withdraws from the common tasks of life, but rather that the powers which the temporal world wields over his personality have been completely annihilated.¹³ Religiously this is expressed in the sentence: "Thou [the Holy Spirit] takest away the power and givest life."¹⁴

The transition to the Christian mode of life is not by means of intellectual apprehension of the doctrines of Christianity, but through a decisive act by which the individual enters into an obedience relationship to Christ who is the pattern and by which relationship his life becomes heterogeneous rather than homogeneous with the life of the world.¹⁵ Once a man acts decisively and comes out into reality, existence can get a grip on him, and God can educate him.¹⁶ To enter into relationship with God means to act.¹⁷ Such action does not preclude reflection. Kierkegaard speaks of a "prolonged" and "continued" reflection¹⁸ which may be the very condition for decisive religious action. Such "continued" reflection holds the individual at the point of decision day after day with the same intensity. It is physically exhausting and requires a great strength of character, but it serves as a "religious hemorrhage"¹⁹ which weakens one's natural clinging to the world.

A man becomes a Christian through a decisive act of obedience to Christ, and if it is true that through such an act his whole existence was transformed, "he must surely be able to remember how he was before he became a Christian, and consequently know what change took place in

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 116. ¹³ *Edifying Discourses*, I, pp. 93-119.

¹⁴ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 200, 203; *Papirer*, X 3 A 470; X 4 A 349.

¹⁶ *The Journals*, No. 1041. ¹⁷ *Ibid.* ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 1088.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

him — if this change consisted in his becoming a Christian.”²⁰

According to Kierkegaard the Christian life is experienced as conflict with the world. The severe nature of his conception of Christianity is due to his insistence upon the qualitative difference between God and man, between God’s idea of what human life ought to be and man’s idea of what it ought to be. Christianity is a transcendent point of departure for the individual’s consciousness, and it brings him into constant collisions with the life and ideas of the world.²¹ The fundamental principles of life become within Christianity the very opposite to those of the world.²² To be or to become a Christian is something for us so contradictory that it repels us and the understanding is brought to a halt.²³

The collision with the world appears in the life of Jesus Christ. He was the God-man and the Absolute. But his life was heterogeneous with the world; the world rejected him and crucified him. The apostles and the early witnesses for Christianity also met a similar experience. The collision is expressed in the thought, “Thou [the Holy Spirit] takest away the power and givest life.”²⁴ The Holy Spirit comes when the person has died to the world. “If we be dead with Christ we shall also live with Him.”²⁵ With the new life the Holy Spirit also brings the gifts of the Spirit—namely, faith, hope, and love. But faith, hope, and love are interpreted from the point of view of the complete “otherness” of Christianity.

There is a natural endowment, a stronger or weaker in-born spontaneity (immediacy) which is commonly regarded as faith. This may express itself as a vital confidence in oneself, in mankind, in the cosmic order or in God. But this is not faith in the Christian sense. Christian

²⁰ *Works of Love*, p. 22.

²¹ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 200.

²² *Papirer*, IX A 284.

²³ *Training in Christianity*, pp. 118, 120.

²⁴ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 106.

²⁵ II Tim. 2:11.

faith is against understanding and on the other side of death. When all confidence in God as immediate apprehension has been excluded, and every possibility and probability has been eliminated (this is what Kierkegaard means by dying to oneself and the world) the Spirit brings faith. Such faith is stronger than the world and possesses the strength of eternity.²⁶

The spirit brings hope. In every man there is a spontaneous (immediate) hope, though in one person it may be stronger and more vital than in another. Christian hope, however, is hope against hope. When every human hope has been eliminated or has transformed itself into hopelessness, and the understanding confirms that there is no hope (this is what is meant by dying to oneself and the world), the Spirit brings the hope of eternity.²⁷

The Spirit brings love. According to human conception there is a love which coheres "immediately" with human nature, and which we regard as a matter of course. This love belongs properly under the category of self-love. Only when a man is dead to selfishness, so that he does not love even a single person selfishly, "when in love to God thou hast learned to hate thyself," can there be a question of Christian love. Christian love is to love according to God's conception of what it means to love, to love that which is unloving, to experience that "love is not loved in the world, that it is hated, that it is mocked, that it is spat upon, that it is crucified."²⁸ Christian love is to love in likeness with Christ the Pattern, and since the world does not understand this love it means suffering and sacrifice.²⁹

The collisions between Christianity and the life of this world appear also in what Kierkegaard regards as the true prayer experience.

Kierkegaard compares prayer to combat³⁰ where the battle field is the inward man. Prayer is usually regarded as the very opposite of warfare, for it is neither a weapon

²⁶ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, pp. 100 f.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101. ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁰ *Papirer*, V B 221.

of offense nor of defense. It is the means employed by the man who surrenders. The collisions are portrayed in an entry in the *Papers*.

"A religious individual prays to God: 'O, God, wilt Thou Thyself educate me'; whereupon the prayer is answered. But what does God do? He takes a rod and begins to pommel the fellow. Alas, the poor man now becomes entirely confused. He had indeed believed himself to be the object of God's love and now these severe blows. So he becomes completely dejected; he believes he has forfeited God's grace. In the meantime, God says: 'If one has said "a" one must also say "b." If the fellow desires to be educated . . . it shall be a thorough education.' And he continues to pound the fellow.

"At last the man is entirely exhausted; he collapses and lo, suddenly the transformation takes place, and he exclaims: 'O my God, I thank Thee, I thank Thee. I had indeed forgotten that I had prayed to Thee to educate me, and as long as things were at their worst, I could not remember and hold fast to how this was to be understood.'"³¹

The man who truly prays perseveres in prayer and is victorious in that God becomes victorious.³² Thus prayer becomes a means of effecting the break with the temporal and the surrender to God.

Prayer places man under absolute obligation to God. He who wants to have dealings with God must obey and serve him. The prayer which cries to God for help places a man under obligation to accept God's help, but according to God's idea of what it means to be helped.³³

In the writings of Kierkegaard Christ is presented primarily as the Pattern (*Vorbild*) or example to be followed, rather than as the atoner for our sins. From a traditional Lutheran viewpoint this may appear to be a one-sided emphasis. However, Kierkegaard's conception of Christ

³¹ *Ibid.*, x 3 A 747. Translation mine.

³² *Edifying Discourses*, iv, pp. 113, 120.

³³ *Christian Discourses*, p. 176.

the Pattern is essentially grounded in his conception of Christ as the atoner for sin.

The reason for Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the Pattern is found in the circumstances of the time. The Middle Ages had gone astray in its emphasis upon Christ as the Pattern. Then came the Lutheran reformation which stressed the other aspect that Christ was a gift of God to be appropriated through faith. But now the times had changed. Lutheranism had become a screen behind which people skulked in the most un-Christian way. Hence the aspect to be stressed was again the Pattern.³⁴

The best expression of Kierkegaard's view of the atonement is found in his discourse "The High Priest." "He [namely Christ] put himself entirely in your place. For when he, when the suffering and death of the Atoner is the full satisfaction for your sin and guilt—when it is the full satisfaction, it assumes indeed your place, or he who made the satisfaction enters into your place, suffering in your place the punishment of sin that you might be saved, suffering death for you that you might live. Did he not and does he not put himself entirely in your place? . . . But the full satisfaction of the atonement means exactly that you step aside, and that he assumes your place.

"What else is the 'Atoner' but a substitute who entirely puts himself in your place and mine; and what else is the comfort of the atonement but this that the substitute makes full satisfaction and puts himself entirely in your place and mine? Thus when the punishing justice here in this world or hereafter on the judgment day seeks the place where I a sinner stand with all my guilt and with my many sins—it does not reach me; I no longer stand in that place. Another stands in my place, Another who puts himself entirely in my place; I am saved at the side of Another, at the side of him who is my Atoner and who put himself entirely in my place. For this I thank thee, Lord Jesus Christ. . . . He by his suffering and death put himself entirely in your place, that you behind him, when judgment is over, may

³⁴ *Papirer*, X 1 A 154.

enter into life where again he has prepared a place for you.”³⁵

In a prayer in *Judge for Yourselves* Kierkegaard presents the relationship of the Atoner and the Pattern: “Lord Jesus Christ, not to afflict us but to save us didst thou say, ‘No man can serve two masters.’ Oh that we might be willing to accept the word and do accordingly, that is, that we might follow thee. Help us all and every one, thou who art both willing and able, thou who art both the Pattern and the Atoner, so that when the striving one sinks under the burden of the Pattern, the Atoner raises him up again, but in the same moment thou art again the Pattern so that he may be kept striving. Thou, oh Atoner, by thy holy suffering and death hast made full satisfaction for all and for everything. An eternal happiness cannot and shall not be earned, it has been earned for us. Yet thou the holy Pattern of the human race and of each individual hast left a footprint so that saved by thy atonement men might in every moment be willing to strive to follow thee.”³⁶

In the first passage we have an expression of the classical view of the atonement of Christ. In the second Kierkegaard brings out the function of the Pattern in relation to the atonement.

For Kierkegaard as well as for Luther³⁷ the doctrine of the atonement relates itself to the struggle of the anxious conscience. Just as the hungry animal understands the difference between a stone and a piece of bread, so the anxious conscience understands the atonement. It is not necessary to prove that one is hungry before one proceeds to eat. How can a man who sits in his study and speculates indifferently and objectively understand the atonement as long as the atonement manifests itself only to the anxious con-

³⁵ *Samlede Værker*, IX, pp. 258-259. Translation mine. Cf. *Christian Discourses*, pp. 368-369.

³⁶ *Samlede Værker*, XII, p. 423. Translation mine. Cf. *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 161. Other references to the atonement are: *Papirer*, VII 1 A 192; X 1 A 132, 279; X 5 A 87, 158; X 6 B 239, 240, 241.

³⁷ Kierkegaard refers to Luther, *Sämtl. Schriften*, herausgegeben von Walch, 11 Theil (Halle 1742), Sp. 49.

science. The natural man has acquired an indifference which makes the atonement superfluous. The anxious conscience is the result of a revelation which teaches him the seriousness of continuing in sin.³⁸

Christ is essentially the pattern. Kierkegaard complains that the Christians of his day regarded Christ as a great hero and a benefactor of the human race, who once and for all has secured our happiness. But if Christ is essentially the Pattern, we are not merely to make use of him but to imitate him.³⁹ While it is true that the New Testament epistles present Christ as the atoner for sin, the gospels present him essentially as the Pattern.⁴⁰ Jesus Christ constantly urged men to follow him. Later came a time when people changed the relationship and began to worship the Pattern. In Protestantism it became presumptuous to imitate the Pattern, and Christ was regarded merely as the atoner. If Christ exists for us only in his exaltation, and everything about his human life and his humiliation is forgotten, admiration and worship are the proper attitudes. If on the other hand Christ is the Pattern, the only way of being a Christian is by imitating the Pattern. Christ never said anything about wanting admirers, admiring worshipers or adherents, he asked for followers. He left behind him foot-steps for those who wanted to be his disciples.⁴¹

The distinction between what Kierkegaard calls an admirer and a follower consists in that a follower strives *to be* what he admires, while he who only admires fails to recognize that the object of his admiration makes a claim upon him. He does not strive to be what he admires.⁴² In relation to Christ the wish to admire is regarded as fraudulent and sinful.⁴³ Yet admiration and worship are not entirely excluded in a person's relationship to the Pattern, but they become a motivating force leading to something higher, namely, imitation. In the case of a purely human pattern there is no time for admiration. Ethically regarded admir-

³⁸ *Papirer*, VII A 192. ³⁹ *The Journals*, No. 698. ⁴⁰ *Papirer*, X 5 A 45.

⁴¹ *Training in Christianity*, pp. 231 f. ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 242 f.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

tion is an escape. The immediate task is to imitate the pattern. When it comes to Christ, the God-man, the situation is reversed for to imitate him without admiration is blasphemy.

"In relation to a purely human pattern—and here there can be no question of worship—there is no time for admiration, one proceeds immediately to the task of imitating the pattern. Ethically this is the right thing. Admiration as an escape is questionable. In relation to Christ this is not the case. Here one sees again (what I so often have called attention to in the *Postscript*) that the Christian religiosity is a separate sphere where the aesthetic relation reappears, but paradoxically, as higher than the ethical. Normally the ethical is higher than the aesthetical. *Aesthetically* (in relation to the human pattern) admiration is the highest; aesthetically the wish to imitate is out of place. *Then comes the ethical* and says: The wish to imitate is precisely the decisive factor, admiration is out of place and is an escape. *Then comes the Paradox-Pattern* (the God-man), and the aesthetic paradox reappears. If I at once will act ethically, I take the Pattern in vain. Here the first and foremost is worship—and only through worship can there be a question of wanting to become like the Pattern. Furthermore the Pattern, himself, must help the one who is to imitate him. In one respect no one can be like the Pattern, or even think of becoming like him (for this would be blasphemy), in so far as the Pattern is the Atoner and the atonement."⁴⁴

We note that with respect to a man's relationship to Christ the first and foremost thing is worship (admiration), then comes imitation. Thus we have in the Christian sphere of life what Kierkegaard terms the reappearance of the aesthetic paradox. Furthermore in the Christian sphere of life there is a transcendental factor: Christ, himself, must help the one who is to become like him. No one can imitate the Pattern in the realm of the atonement.

⁴⁴ *Papirer*, X 1 A 134. Translation and italics are mine. Cf. *The Journals*, No. 887.

In the religious experience of the Christian there is an interaction of Christ's function as the Atoner and his function as the Pattern. When the disciple who strives to imitate the Pattern sinks under the burden and despairs because of his failure, the Atoner restores him, and at the very moment of restoration Christ is again the Pattern who requires imitation. Thus the disciple is kept in continuous striving. The atoning work of Christ is to furnish the disciple with confidence and boldness to imitate the Pattern. Kierkegaard nails to the mast the principle that in every effort to follow Christ the disciple is to be supported by the sense of having appropriated Christ's atonement, a sense which removes all fear from the human soul.⁴⁵

By means of his constant emphasis upon the Pattern, Kierkegaard wanted to restore respect for Christianity and for what it means to be a Christian—to remove Christianity from the realm of learned discussions in the class rooms and parlors—to the sphere of the subjective or personal life where it belongs.

The emphasis in Kierkegaard's presentation of Christianity is expressed in the oft repeated statement, "Christ is the Pattern."⁴⁶ The mere admirer relates himself to Christ only through the imagination.⁴⁷ "The admirer is not willing to make any sacrifices, to give up anything worldly, to reconstruct his life, to be what he admires or let his life express it—but in words, verbal expressions, asseverations, he is inexhaustible in affirming how highly he prizes Christianity. The follower, on the other hand, aspires to be what he admires."⁴⁸ He is prepared to face the dangers and sufferings involved in following Christ. Christ's life was one of suffering, and to be a follower of Christ means that one's life has as great a likeness to his as it is possible for a man's life to have.⁴⁹ To Kierkegaard suffering is the sign of the God-relationship, and to be loved by God and to love God

⁴⁵ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, pp. 216 f.

⁴⁶ *Training in Christianity*, pp. 277, 250; *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, pp. 161-217.

⁴⁷ *Training in Christianity*, p. 237. ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

is to suffer.⁵⁰ Here again it is essential to distinguish between the admirer and the follower, for it is one thing "to become professor of the fact that another suffered,"⁵¹ and quite something else to suffer oneself. Kierkegaard was bitter in his denunciations of parsons whose religion did not go beyond the presentation of the sufferings of Christ and of the martyrs. ". . . Dons and parsons live by presenting the sufferings of others, and that is regarded as religious . . . ; for the religion of the congregation is nothing else but hearing this presented. As a religion, *charmante*, just about as genuine as tea made from a bit of paper which had once been used to wrap up a few dried tea leaves from which tea had already been made three times."⁵²

Why must the true Christian suffer? Because God's concept of what it means to love is entirely different from that of men. God's love is expressed in the cross of Christ which is love's collision with the world. His love destroys the self-love in the person whom he loves. It is a love which requires of the Christian a "dying away from" or an absolute break with the world. The natural man cannot understand this type of love but regards it as cruel and inimical.⁵³ So there arises a conflict between the man who follows Christ and the one who does not. While Christianity in its very nature is love, it appears to the natural man as cruelty. This is due to the fact that Christianity exists and unfolds itself in a sinful world. The inimical is not so much the nature of Christianity but the fate which befalls it. Furthermore the apparent cruelty is due to the fact that the Christian is himself a sinner whose life is to be remade by the divine love.⁵⁴ This apparent cruelty of Christianity is, according to Kierkegaard, so fearful that only the anguish of the consciousness of sin can bring a man into relationship with Christianity.⁵⁵

According to Kierkegaard, Christianity is not to be regarded as a comfort for suffering. He wrote a great number of discourses dealing with human suffering. Many of these

⁵⁰ *The Journals*, Nos. 1270, 1287. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1362. ⁵² *Ibid.*, 1361.

⁵³ *Papirer*, IX A 6, 226. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, IX A 329. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, X 1 A 279; X 6 B 240.

end with the thought, "Only sin is man's ruin."⁵⁶ Christianity makes it easier to endure suffering by pointing to a suffering which is qualitatively greater than all other suffering. Kierkegaard is not concerned with the metaphysical problem of the cause and purpose of human suffering, but he finds a solution to the problem of present suffering by placing it in relation to Christianity.

Kierkegaard's emphasis upon the imitation of the Pattern had as its purpose to stress the ideals and teach men humility before God and the need of grace.⁵⁷ First he emphasized the severity of God, then God's grace. This thought is expressed in the order in which he published his works. Following *Works of Love*, *Training in Christianity*, and *For Self-Examination*, each of which stressed the severity, he published discourses dealing with God's grace. Kierkegaard never regarded the fulfilling of ideals as identical with Christianity; on the contrary, it is God's grace and the forgiveness of sins which are the heart of the Christian religion.⁵⁸ God's forgiveness is limitless.⁵⁹ This he had learned in the school of Luther.⁶⁰

The relationship between man's striving to imitate the Pattern and God's grace may be described as follows. The Pattern is to be stressed in order to humble us by exhibiting how far we are from having attained the ideal. In relation to God's grace the insistence upon the imitation serves as an obstacle, a "Halt now!" which in a single instance alters everything, reveals man's impotence before God, and drives him to Christ for mercy.⁶¹ When we humble ourselves, God's grace has no limits. Grace must, however, be regarded as a divine priority, and not as a *depositum* which men may dispense at will.⁶² Grace must not be introduced in such a manner that it stifles human endeavor.⁶³ It must not be taken in vain or become a Prot-

⁵⁶ *Christian Discourses*, pp. 107, 118, 128, 138, 148, 153, 163.

⁵⁷ *Papirer*, X 2 A 30, 76; X 4 A 349, 352.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VII A 167; VIII A 229, 558, 647, 649; IX A 176.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, IX A 176, 328, 331; X 1 A 12. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, X 1 A 192, 246, 279.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, X 2 A 76; *Training in Christianity*, pp. 23, 25. ⁶² *Ibid.*, X 5 A 64.

⁶³ *The Journals*, No. 1248.

estant indulgence.⁶⁴ According to Kierkegaard there is no personal certainty of the forgiveness of sins which is not accompanied by a persistent passionate striving to imitate the ideal.⁶⁵ The forgiveness of sins presupposes "the tortures of a contrite conscience."⁶⁶ Thus the sense of utter failure, the sense of certainty of the forgiveness of sin, and the persistent passionate striving to imitate the Pattern become interacting and complementary components of the Christian consciousness.

It is characteristic of Kierkegaard's conception of God's grace that God cannot communicate himself to a human being without communicating the suffering which is a part of his love. When this suffering is communicated to a person its human correlation is contrition and repentance.

In *Either/Or* and in *Stages on Life's Way* Kierkegaard had presented the ethical mode of life in the person of Judge William. But the judge had intimated that there might be an exception to the universal demands of ethics. The exception might be due to the individual's God-relationship. "Such a religious exception will ignore the universal, he will outbid the terms offered by temporal reality."⁶⁷

Fear and Trembling and *Repetition* showed the collapse of the ethical mode of life and the necessity of seeking a deeper level of existence, for "when the individual by his guilt has gone outside the universal, he can return to it only by virtue of having come as the individual into an absolute relationship with the absolute."⁶⁸ Because of sin, life and existence require a new beginning with a transcendent point of departure.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Johannes Climacus stated that the maximum attainment of the religiously existing individual was simultaneously to maintain an absolute relationship to God or the absolute *telos* and a

⁶⁴ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 49.

⁶⁵ *Papirer*, X 2 A 239, X 3 A 182.

⁶⁶ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 209.

⁶⁷ *Stages*, p. 170.

⁶⁸ *Fear and Trembling*, p. 151.

relative relationship to the temporal and relative ends.⁶⁹ But he also emphasized that the absolute *telos* does not become concrete in the relative tasks of life.⁷⁰ Such a position threatens to break down all ethical relationships. The solution to this dilemma Kierkegaard finds in the personal appropriation of the atonement of Christ. In the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself as the God who loved me first, and who kindles my love to him. God's love places me under obligation, and it becomes my task to express my love for God in my relationship to others.

The *Works of Love*, one of the most popular of the religious writings of Kierkegaard, presents a social ethics based upon the message of Christianity. It is not a social ethics in the modern sense of the word; it makes no attempt to present the ideal Christian community or to apply the principles of Christianity to political, social, or economic problems, but "it deals profoundly with the attitude of the individual toward his fellowmen."⁷¹

Geismar has pointed out⁷² that in *Works of Love* Kierkegaard compares the pagan view of love as represented in Aristotle's concept of friendship, *φιλία*, with the Christian concept of love. The pagan concept of friendship was a spontaneous relationship between a limited number of persons, and hence what Kierkegaard terms a relationship of "passionate partiality."⁷³ The unique characteristics of Christian love are that it is love for the neighbor, it is self-denying, and it is everlastingly secured against any change since it is grounded in the God-relationship.

God is the hidden, incomprehensible fountainhead of all love.⁷⁴ His love supports the cosmic order; if it were withdrawn for a single instant, everything would be thrown into confusion.⁷⁵ In order to avoid the mystic's fallacy of contemplating the source of love, Kierkegaard des-

⁶⁹ *Postscript*, pp. 364, 377.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁷¹ David F. Swenson, *Something About Kierkegaard*, p. 101.

⁷² Eduard Geismar, *Religionsfilosofi, en Undersøgelse af hvad Religion og Kristendom er* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1945), pp. 79, 369.

⁷³ *Works of Love*, p. 44.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

ignates Christian love as "the works of love."⁷⁶ Christ's love was the work of love, it was not a mere inner feeling, but his entire life.⁷⁷ Love is recognized by its fruits, but in recognizing and determining love everything depends on how the act is performed.⁷⁸

Christian love is not based upon emotions or sentiments. Its validity and continuity is secured by a command of God which has eternal validity:⁷⁹ "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "*Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love everlasting secure against every change; everlastingly emancipated in blessed independence; everlastingly happy, assured against despair.*"⁸⁰

Christianity begins with the assumption that a man loves himself, and in this respect it is unlike the profound thinkers who begin without any postulates.⁸¹ Concerning man's relationship to God the command says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Only God shall a man love higher than himself, and he is to be loved in unconditional obedience, even when his demands seem injurious to man.⁸² Love of God is the decisive factor, and from it is derived love of one's neighbor. Only when a man loves God more than himself, can he love his neighbor as himself.⁸³

"In earthly love and friendship partiality is the middle term. In love to the neighbor, God is the middle term; if you love God above all else, then you also love your neighbor and in your neighbor every man. Only by loving God above all else can one love his neighbor in the other man."⁸⁴

That which distinguishes Christian love from all other love is the fact that it is grounded in the God-relationship.⁸⁵ As soon as the God-relationship is excluded the relationship is reduced to the human category of love.⁸⁶ "Worldly wisdom and Christianity agree that there is a

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 7 ff. ⁷⁷ *The Journals*, No. 932.

⁷⁸ *Works of Love*, p. 12. ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15 ff. ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

law which love must fulfill in order to be love, but they disagree about what the law is, and this disagreement is an infinite difference. *Worldly wisdom believes that love is a relationship between man and man; Christianity teaches that love is a relationship between man-God-man, that is, that God is the middle term.*⁸⁷

There are several human conceptions of love, such as sensuality, marital love, parental love, friendship, and love for country. Christianity does not abrogate these relationships; it does not cancel drives and inclinations in human nature. It "allows all this to have validity, to have its own significance in external matters; but at the same time it wishes through its teaching about love, which is not calculated on convenience, to let the transformation of the infinite take place inwardly."⁸⁸ In reality Christianity sweeps away the distinctions between the different kinds of human love and places them all on the same level,⁸⁹ for it points to a love which is qualitatively different. Christianity knows only one variety of love, namely spiritual love (or *Geistesliebe*),⁹⁰ "but this can lie at the bottom of and be present in every other expression of love."⁹¹ This kind of love is characterized by self-denial.⁹² This variety of love is to be basic in every human relationship. In the relationship to the object of its love it knows nothing as its own. The category "mine" has dropped out, and the distinctions "mine" and "yours" are completely abolished.⁹³

The purpose of Christian love is to lead the object of its love to God. To love another human being is to help him to love God; to be loved by another person is to be helped to love God. All love which does not have as its sole purpose to lead the loved one to God stops at the human conception of what it means to love.⁹⁴

How does Kierkegaard's conception of Christian love apply to the marriage relationship? A Christian may marry and love his wife dearly, but in this relationship there must

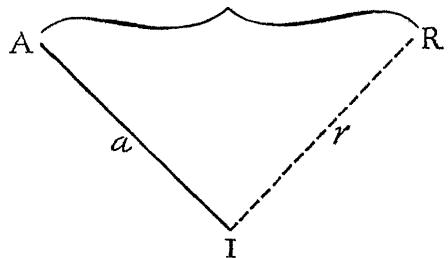
⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87. ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117. Cf. p. 118. ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 118-119. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119. ⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 43-46.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 256. ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 87 f., 92, 98.

be a fundamental understanding between God and him.⁹⁵ The wife is first of all his neighbor, the fact that she is his wife is a designation of the more specific relationship.⁹⁶ It is not the wife who shall teach the husband the meaning of love, or vice versa. God shall teach each of them the meaning of love.⁹⁷ A person belongs first of all to God who has the first priority on every life. Before he enters into any other relationship, Christianity asks if he has consulted God. In other words, Christianity makes the marriage relationship, as well as every other relationship between man and man, a matter of conscience.⁹⁸ Since God has the first priority on his life, the Christian cannot belong to another in a relationship of love (such as marriage) unless he in the same relationship relates himself to God. Christianity audits the relationship and asks each party if he first of all relates himself to God. If he does not, Christianity does not hesitate to prevent the relationship.⁹⁹

Geismar illustrates the task of the religiously existing individual in the following manner:¹⁰⁰



The religiously existing individual (*I*) is to maintain at the same time an absolute relation (*a*) to the absolute telos (*A*) and a relative relation (*r*) to the relative telos (*R*). The bracket indicates that *one* action is to express both relationships. For instance the action through which a man expresses his love for his wife shall at the same time express

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119. ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114. ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 113, 114, 119. ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁰ Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, II, p. 89.

his absolute obedience to God's holy will, i.e., he is to love his wife not according to her concept of what love is, but according to God's concept of what love is.

The task is to exist in the relative avocations of life precisely in order to exercise the absolute relation in renunciation.

Christian love, or love for one's neighbor is the eternal equality between man and man.¹⁰¹ In this sense Christianity sets up a tremendous incentive to Christian brotherhood. On the other hand Christianity does not remove the class differences and social inequalities. It points to a higher equality. It addresses itself to each individual and says that God has created him and Christ has redeemed him. It says, "Close your door and pray to God, and you have the highest."¹⁰² Christianity permits the social inequalities to remain but teaches the eternal equality.¹⁰³

Kierkegaard had little or no appreciation of the struggle for social equality. The revolutionary movements with their emphasis on liberty, equality, and brotherhood he regarded as highly superficial. To attempt to create an artificial equality is to attempt the impossible. That which constituted man's true equality, the equality before God had been forgotten.¹⁰⁴ If we ask, what would be his attitude to the Social Gospel, the answer is: Such ideas as the brotherhood of man, the fatherhood of God, the Christian community, "simply vanish when Kierkegaard faces the blinding flash of God's unquestionable authority all alone."¹⁰⁵

In "the works of love," or the love for the neighbor, we find the same idea of conflict with the world which characterizes Kierkegaard's presentation of the Christian life. In *Philosophical Fragments*¹⁰⁶ he had described the suffering of God's love in the picture of the king who loved the poor maiden. God's suffering was due to the fact that his love

¹⁰¹ *Works of Love*, p. 48. ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 57-60. ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ *Papirer*, IX B, p. 311.

¹⁰⁵ Otto Kraushaar, "Kierkegaard in English," *The Journal of Philosophy*, XXXIX, p. 605.

¹⁰⁶ Pp. 19 f.

was heterogeneous with the world; his love was different from it, and out of harmony with it. The cross of Christ testifies to the fact that not only did the world misunderstand God's love, but it hated it and crucified it. God's love as expressed in Jesus Christ is the suffering of being misunderstood by the loved one. Christian love is to love as Christ loved, and its characteristic is suffering due to being misunderstood, despised, and hated in the world. If God's love is to be the qualifying determination of Christian love, the conflict cannot be avoided.¹⁰⁷

Kierkegaard's conception of Christian love is not purely negative and ascetic. On the contrary - it is positive and highly polemical.

The conception of the Christian life as essentially that of suffering cannot be dismissed as merely a psychotic manifestation. It is the consequence of Kierkegaard's conception of Christianity as a transcendent supernatural revelation. This is everywhere the assumption in his thinking. According to Hegel revelation was the ingenious manifestation of the universal mind in the realm of nature and finite persons.¹⁰⁸ To Kierkegaard this was a confusion of tongues. The essential aspects of his concept of revelation can be stated in the following propositions:¹⁰⁹

(1) Christian revelation is an objective reality apart from the individual Christian consciousness. It is the touchstone which determines whether or not one is a Christian.

(2) Christian revelation is no identity of subject and object. Every Christian is conscious of the fact that the revelation did not arise in his own heart.

(3) If there was not a single person who was aware that God has revealed Himself in human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, he has nevertheless revealed Himself. The last statement appears as a contradiction in terminology, but it

¹⁰⁷ *Works of Love*, pp. 90, 99.

¹⁰⁸ H. H. Horne, "An Idealistic Philosophy of Education," *National Society for the Study of Education, Forty-First Yearbook*, Part I, p. 147; Kierkegaard, *Papirer*, I A 328; II, 426; III C 32; VII 2 B, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ *Papirer*, VII 2 B, pp. 204, 205, 208.

is not a contradiction of the idea if "revelation" is regarded as an act on the part of God and apart from the person to whom it is revealed.

(4) Christian revelation is a transcendent point of departure for the human consciousness and cannot be mediated.

If divine revelation was a revelation of something which was not of *decisive* importance in human life it is conceivable that it would present no collisions with human life. But if revelation is a communication of existence, a revelation of God in character, in Jesus Christ, for the purpose of transforming the whole existence of human life, it is of necessity polemical. The conflicts of the Christian life are inherent in Christianity itself. After all what would be the value of a revelation which was identical with human thinking?¹¹⁰

A word which Kierkegaard often used to express the ethico-religious life is "reduplication." Reduplication means to exist in what one understands to be what one teaches,¹¹¹ or to transform one's life in conformity with what one objectively holds to be true. It is the decisive expression for the Christian life. From the Christian point of view it means to be a follower of Christ in character. It is true altogether too often that one man attacks Christianity while another defends it, but if one examines their lives one finds that neither of them regards it as very serious.¹¹² To preach Christianity without existing in the same categories is nonsense and a deception, for it fails to give the decisive expression to what one preaches.¹¹³ Christianly speaking, the teacher must be what he teaches.

¹¹⁰ E. Geismar, *Søren Kierkegaard*, v, pp. 54, 56.

¹¹¹ *Training in Christianity*, pp. 123, 133; *The Journals*, No. 804.

¹¹² *The Journals*, No. 804.

¹¹³ *For Self-Examination*, pp. 36, 78; *The Journals*, No. 651.

CHAPTER XII

SOCRATIC MIDWIFERY

THE COMMUNICATION OF THE TRUTH



The god compels me to act as midwife, but has never allowed me to beget.¹



IN Kierkegaard's *Journals* for 1843 is an interesting notation, written immediately after the publication of *Either/Or*. The passage reflects his sense of spiritual kinship with Socrates: "There was once a young man, as fortunately gifted as an Alcibiades. . . . He looked around him for a Socrates, but among his contemporaries he found none. Then he prayed the gods to change him into one. And behold! He who had been so proud of being an Alcibiades was so shamed and humbled by the grace of the gods that in the very moment of receiving that of which he felt proud, he felt himself to be less than all others."²

The "young man" is Kierkegaard himself who at the age of twenty-eight for the degree *magister artium* had presented the dissertation, *The Concept Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates*. The same "constant reference to Socrates" is found throughout all his works which literally abound with references to the ancient sage of Athens.

Socrates had deserted the study of the natural sciences in order to occupy himself with moral life. According to Kierkegaard, he worked to emancipate the individual from the state.³ For this purpose he developed the indirect maieutic method. His attitude toward the sophists was that of irony. This irony was expressed most deeply in the Socratic irony. Thus Socrates did not know with certainty whether he was immortal, for he knew that immortality was a spiritual qualification, beyond all immediate verification.

¹ Socrates, Plato, *Theatetus*, §150. ² *The Journals*, No. 414.
³ *Ibid.*, No. 115.

Yet his life expressed the fact that there is an immortality.⁴

Kierkegaard regarded himself as the heir of Socrates. His task was a Socratic one.⁵ Socrates had a negative attitude to the state and to the sophistic knowledge of his day; Kierkegaard had a negative attitude to Christendom and to the common concept of what it meant to be a Christian. The presumption was that one is a Christian as a matter of course, since one had been baptized in childhood.⁶ His purpose was to revise the conception of what it means to be a Christian, and *to make men aware of Christianity*.⁷ To accomplish this he took his cue from Socrates. Hence Kierkegaard did not loudly proclaim himself to be the only Christian. Instead of being an authority in the field of religion, he took the position that he was not even a Christian (Socratic ignorance) and that instead of being the teacher, he was merely the learner.⁸ The task was to deceive men into entering the life of religious obligation, and to this end Kierkegaard developed his method of indirect communication which is the foundation of all his aesthetic works.

The main sources for this study of the indirect method of communication are *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (publ. Feb. 1846); *The Point of View for My Authorship* (written in 1848-1849 but publ. in 1859 after Kierkegaard's death); *Training in Christianity* (publ. Sept. 1850); and *A Note Concerning My Authorship* (publ. 1851). Since the indirect communication is intrinsically connected with Kierkegaard's authorship, and since he himself changed his attitude toward this method of communication it is best to deal with this subject from a chronological point of view.

In the *Postscript* Kierkegaard speaks of a subjective and an objective way of thinking. *Objective thinking*⁹ deals with what we commonly call scientific knowledge. Such thinking translates everything into results, and its truth is

⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 763. ⁵ *Samlede Værker*, XIV, p. 352. ⁶ *Postscript*, p. 329.

⁷ *Samlede Værker*, XIV, p. 352; *The Journals*, Nos. 638, 1001.

⁸ *Samlede Værker*, XIV, p. 352; *The Journals*, No. 1001.

⁹ *Postscript*, pp. 68, 70.

entirely independent of the knowing subject. Such truth can be understood directly and recited by rote.

*Subjective thinking*¹⁰ deals with ethico-religious truth, or what Kierkegaard calls essential knowledge. Subjective thinking does not refer to objective ethical standards or objective religious knowledge which can be learned by rote, but to the assimilation of the truth in inwardness and its realization in the individual's own personality. Consequently the subjective thinker requires what is termed a "double reflection."¹¹

1. The first reflection: the subject thinker "thinks the universal," i.e., he finds a universal principle.

2. The second reflection: he assimilates the universal in his inwardness, i.e., he applies it to his own personality and situation.

The last reflection is not a cooperative enterprise; on the contrary, it isolates the individual and clears the road for action.¹²

Corresponding to the two forms of thinking are two forms of communication. *Direct communication* is every form of teaching used in transmitting objective knowledge.

The *indirect communication* is necessary whenever the truth to be communicated is of the nature of inwardness and essentially a secret.¹³ At this point it is necessary to distinguish between an essential secret and an accidental secret. For example: The nature of the atomic bomb is a military secret. But it is an accidental secret since it is capable of being directly understood as soon as it is revealed. To illustrate the meaning of an essential secret Kierkegaard goes back to Socrates.¹⁴ Socrates isolated himself from every external relationship by appealing to his daemon. He no doubt assumed that every other person had to do the same. The appeal to the daemon constituted his God-relationship and was an essential secret which could not be directly communicated. All that Socrates

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 70, 217. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹² David F. Swenson, *Something About Kierkegaard*, p. 114.

¹³ *Postscript*, p. 73. ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

could do in the manner of communication was to assist others negatively by means of his maieutic art or midwifery in order that they might arrive at the truth by themselves.

The first principle of indirect communication is that the personalities of the teacher and the learner are held distinctly apart.¹⁵ The teacher has made himself free by means of the double reflection. The task is to emancipate the learner, and for that reason he cannot communicate himself directly. If he did, the learner's God-relationship which is an absolute relationship would be dependent upon a relative relationship, that of teacher and learner. Reference is again made to Socrates,¹⁶ who just because he was an ethical teacher recognized the non-existence of a direct relationship between teacher and pupil. Ethical truth is inwardness and this inwardness as it appears in each person is exactly what separates the personalities and holds them apart. Socrates was ugly, with clumsy feet and growths on the forehead and elsewhere. But this is exactly what Socrates regarded as his favorable appearance, since it served to keep the learner at a distance and did not encourage a personal relationship to the teacher.

The second principle of indirect communication is that the teacher's form of communication should embody as much artistry as he has reflection when he exists in his thought.¹⁷ The communication must not be a direct expression of the double reflection, it must be a maieutic art. How Kierkegaard himself practiced this art by his literary presentation will be considered later in this chapter. His instruments were irony, pathos, and dialectics: "Now if anyone wishes to object . . . that all I have is a little irony, a little pathos, and a little dialectic, my reply would be: What else should anyone have who proposes to set forth the ethical? Should he perhaps seek to frame it objectively in a formal paragraph structure, fit to be learned and recited by rote, so as to contradict himself by his form? In

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 73. ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222; Xenophon, *Symposium*, §5.

¹⁷ *Postscript*, pp. 68 f., 73.

my opinion, pathos and irony and dialectic are *quod sideratur*, when the ethical is *quod erat demonstrandum*.¹⁸

How does Kierkegaard's theory of communication relate itself to the philosophy of the stages?¹⁹

1. When life is viewed aesthetically the relationship between teacher and pupil is entirely relative.

2. When life is viewed ethico-religiously (within the category of religion A) each person is regarded according to his nature as equally adapted for eternity and essentially related to the eternal. The teacher steps aside and is merely "an occasion."

3. When life is viewed from the standpoint of paradoxical religion or the specifically Christian religion, man is not by nature essentially related to eternity for sin has intervened. The teacher is the Deity in time who is not merely "an occasion" but who provides the *condition* which makes the disciple a new creature. One recalls that Socrates was essentially a "midwife" who could deliver but not bring forth life. The Deity in time is the condition for bringing forth the new life which is the Christian life. Within Christianity the relationship between the human teacher and pupil remains maieutic.

So far we have been considering the concept of the indirect communication as presented in the *Postscript*.

Throughout his whole life Søren Kierkegaard suffered from melancholy depressions, something which accounts for the *Eingeslossenheit* or self-isolation in his personality. He himself realized that this was the psychological factor behind the pseudonymous writings and the indirect communication.²⁰ During Holy Week 1848 he had a deep religious experience which was accompanied by a temporary relief from his melancholy depressions. He writes: "My whole being is changed. My reserve and self-isolation is broken—I must speak."²¹ Several of the *Journal* entries from that time speak of his struggle with the melancholy. He came to the conclusion that the self-isolation with its

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 508. ²⁰ *The Journals*, Nos. 641, 936, 938.

²¹ *Ibid.*, No. 747.

pseudonymous works and indirect communication might be a *daemonia*.²² The maieutic was really an expression of superiority in relationship to other men.²³ It was clear that from now on it would be inexcusable to continue the pseudonymous authorship. Instead of representing all things in the medium of imagination, he would come forward personally as one who wished to serve the cause of Christianity.²⁴

The communication of Christianity is essentially "bearing witness." The maieutic art can never be final. Socrates believed that each individual possessed the truth, therefore the maieutic form was the final one. On the other hand, from the Christian point of view, the individual does not possess the truth, but it lies in a revelation which must be proclaimed. While Kierkegaard abandoned the indirect communication, he maintained that the maieutic method was useful in Christendom (where people live under the impression that they are Christians) in order to call attention to what it really means to be a Christian. Ultimately the maieuticer must become a witness.²⁵

When he abandoned the indirect method, Kierkegaard felt the need once for all to furnish posterity with an explanation of the authorship. By the end of the year he had practically completed *The Point of View for My Authorship*. Paradoxically enough it is a direct communication of the indirect method of communication and its relationship to the authorship as a whole. The book was then laid aside and it was first published four years after his death. Only two very brief explanations were available during his own lifetime: "First and Last Explanation" in the *Postscript* and *A Note on My Work as an Author*.²⁶

According to Kierkegaard himself the whole authorship

²² *Ibid.*, Nos. 748, 749, 754, 807, 937 and especially 936, 939.

²³ *Papirer*, IX A 221. ²⁴ *The Journals*, No. 808. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, No. 809.

²⁶ Since Kierkegaard explains his use of the indirect method of communication in *The Point of View for My Authorship* and *A Note on My Work as an Author*, I do not deem it necessary to elaborate on the involved and not altogether clear presentation of the indirect method in the *Postscript*.

relates itself to the problem of becoming a Christian. The polemic is directed at the illusion that in Christendom all people regard themselves as Christians.²⁷ In *The Point of View* Kierkegaard divides the authorship into two separate and distinct parts or periods which would make it appear as follows:

1. *The Aesthetic production:*

Either/Or

Fear and Trembling

Repetition

The Concept of Dread

Prefaces

Philosophical Fragments

Stages on Life's Way

Eighteen Edifying Discourses and Thoughts
on Crucial Situations in Human Life published
at various times throughout this part of the authorship.

The connecting link: Concluding Unscientific Postscript

2. *The Religious production:*

Edifying Discourses in Varying Tenor

Works of Love

Christian Discourses

The Crisis in the Life of an Actress, an aesthetic article by *Inter et Inter*

The following books written by Kierkegaard after 1848 belong under the religious production:

The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air

Two Ethico-Religious Essays

The Sickness Unto Death

The High-Priest—The Publican—The Woman Who Was a Sinner

Training in Christianity

One Edifying Discourse

Two Discourses at the Friday Communion Service

A Note Concerning My Authorship
For Self-Examination

²⁷ *The Point of View*, pp. 5 f., 42 f., 13.

The Moment, a series of ten pamphlets
 The Point of View for My } Published
 Authorship } after his
 Judge for Yourselves } death

Shortly after the publication of *Either/Or* Kierkegaard published *Two Edifying Discourses*. Such discourses were constantly accompanying the aesthetic works and later published in a separate volume, *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*. The religious interest was thus evident throughout the whole aesthetic production. Thus Kierkegaard was, as he says,²⁸ a religious author from the beginning. Neither did his aesthetic interest disappear for in the midst of the religious production we find the aesthetic article by the pseudonym *Inter et Inter*.

The *Postscript* forms the dividing line and is a category by itself. It is neither aesthetic nor in a strict sense religious. The pseudonym Johannes Climacus is used, but in this case Kierkegaard's own name appears on the title page as responsible for the publication. In the earlier pseudonymous writings Kierkegaard's name did not appear.²⁹ The *Postscript* posits the problem of the whole authorship, that of becoming a Christian.³⁰ In one of the chapters Johannes Climacus reviews all the earlier works of the authorship, the aesthetic as well as the religious, in order to show how these mark out one way of becoming a Christian: *away* from the aesthetic and back to what it means to become a Christian. Johannes Climacus himself presents another way: *away* from the System (Hegel), the speculative, and back to what it means to become a Christian.³¹ The movement throughout the whole authorship is the same: away from the complex and back to the simple.³² First the aesthetic or the romantic, the philosophical or speculative, then the simple or the religious. In the aesthetic production the Christian categories are transposed into "reflection," i.e., the religious categories are brought forth by means of literary characters who are Kierkegaard's own

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10 f.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41 f., 74, 93.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 147 f.

creations. These characters live and exist in religious categories and mingle with other characters who exist consistently in aesthetic and ethical categories. In the religious production the religious is "altogether and utterly withdrawn from reflection and restored to simplicity."³³

The presentation throughout the whole authorship is maieutic but, with the qualification which Kierkegaard discovered following his Easter experience, the maieuticer must ultimately become a witness.³⁴ Each of the books in his aesthetic production is devoted to some life-problem, but instead of presenting the problem in long series of logically arranged paragraphs, he clothes his ideas with flesh and blood. Thus we have a comparative morphology of life attitudes, not didactic treatises but works of art. Kierkegaard's majestic scope, his vivid style with its imagery are summed up in a delightful paragraph by David F. Swenson: "This mingling of jest and earnest; their alternation between humor, irony and pathos; this illustration of abstract categories by the use of stories and anecdotes taken directly from the streets of Copenhagen, this constant shifting back and forth between logical abstractions and poetic imagery; this incorporation of a category in an imagined personality, who is permitted to speak for himself, so that we may see him as he is; this succession of different pseudonymous authors, each representing a distinct nuance of position; this teasing personality relationship which the style seeks to establish between the author and the reader, after the manner of a Socratic gadfly—all this is not mere idiosyncrasy of a versatile and capricious writer. It is rather a reflective maieutic, the sign of an author who has something more profound in mind than a mere appeal to the abstract understanding of the reader."³⁵

It is to this tremendous aesthetic production Kierkegaard refers when he says in the *Postscript*³⁶ that the subjective thinker must pass the requirement that his form of communication "should embody artistically as much of

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 147. ³⁴ *The Journals*, No. 809.

³⁵ *Something About Kierkegaard*, pp. 113 f. ³⁶ *Postscript*, pp. 68 f., 73.

reflection as he himself has when existing in his thought." The authorship is indeed an indirect communication of Kierkegaard's own existence before God. It reflects his own education in Christianity. The whole authorship was his own education³⁷ before God, away from romanticism and speculative philosophy and back to Christianity. "God chose a man who also needed to be educated, and educated him *privatissime*, so that he might be able to teach others from his own experience."³⁸

A word should be said with reference to the relationship between the pseudonyms and the indirect communications. All the aesthetic works have pseudonymous authors. *Either/Or* and *Stages* may serve as illustrations.

1. *Either/Or* has as its publisher Victor Eremita, but Victor Eremita has not written the work; he found the manuscript in a secret drawer of an old secretary. Volume I contains the papers of A, an aestheticist. In the last part of the volume is the "Diary of Johannes the Seducer" which, in an unguarded moment, A had copied and afterward published. Volume II consists of the papers of B, the ethicist. Incorporated among his papers is a sermon by a country parson.

2. *Stages* is published by Hilarius Bookbinder who found the manuscript among some books left in his shop by a certain *literatus*. The first part of this work is "*In Vino Veritas*" written under the pseudonym William Afham. Here we find the following characters: Johannes the Seducer (author of the "Diary" in *Either/Or*), Victor Eremita (the publisher of *Either/Or*), a young man, Constantine Constantius (the pseudonymous author of *Repetition*), and the Ladies' Tailor. The second part of *Stages* is "Observations about Marriage" by a Married Man. The third part is "Guilty?/Not Guilty?" published by Frater Taciturnus who accidentally fished up a chest containing the manuscript from the bottom of the lake. The manuscript was the diary of Quidam.

Here we have an authorship as involved as a Chinese

³⁷ *The Point of View*, p. 155.

³⁸ *The Journals*, No. 645.

puzzle box. The pseudonymity had its ground in the character of the production. Each pseudonym represents his own life view. Kierkegaard is only a *souffleur* who has poetically produced the authors and their characters.³⁹ He would not be quoted as responsible for any view expressed by the pseudonyms. "In the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine, I have no opinion about these works except as third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as reader."⁴⁰ By means of the pseudonyms he brought about what he regarded as the first principle of the indirect method of communication, to keep the personalities of the teacher and the learner distinctly apart.⁴¹

There is a distinct interrelationship between the pseudonyms and Kierkegaard's works as a religious author. During the period of aesthetic production he published edifying discourses under his own name. These were in "direct speech." According to Kierkegaard all these pseudonyms stood on a lower religious level than himself, as author of edifying discourses. During the period when he constantly produced poetic characters, he himself lived in decisively religious categories. Among the religious production are two works *The Sickness Unto Death*, and *Training in Christianity* under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus but published by Kierkegaard. Johannes Climacus, author of the *Postscript* said about himself that he was not a Christian; Anti-Climacus is a Christian in an extraordinary way far above Kierkegaard's own level as author of *Edifying Discourses*. For that reason Kierkegaard did not publish these works with his own name as author.⁴²

It remains to point out some of the educational principles which are evident in the authorship-principles which Kierkegaard fully recognized:

1. *The personalities of the teacher and the learner must be held distinctly apart.* This principle⁴³ expresses a deep

³⁹ *Postscript*, p. 551.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 551; cf. *The Journals*, No. 1238; *The Point of View*, p. 155.

⁴¹ *Postscript*, pp. 69, 73.

⁴² *The Point of View*, pp. 146 ff.; p. 85 note; *The Journals*, No. 936.

⁴³ *Supra*, p. 193.

appreciation and respect for the independence of each individual personality.

2. *The teacher* (or in the case of Kierkegaard, the religious author) *must first of all take pains to discover the level of the learner and begin at that point*. This is the secret of all maieutic art. The teacher must discover where the learner is.⁴⁴

"If you can do that, if you can find exactly the place where the other is and begin there, you may perhaps have the luck to lead him to the place where you are.

"For to be a teacher does not mean simply to affirm that such a thing is so; or to deliver a lecture, etc. No, to be a teacher in the right sense is to be a learner. Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner, put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he understands, and in the way he understands it, in case you have not understood it before. Or if you have understood it before, you allow him to subject you to an examination so that he may be sure you know your part."⁴⁵

Thus the teacher does not loudly proclaim himself a Christian but, as in the case of Johannes Climacus, he places himself even at a lower level than the learner. Thus if the learner does not live in the categories of Christianity or even recognize the correct categories, but nevertheless proclaims himself to be a Christian, the teacher may take the position that he is not a Christian, but only one who seeks to discover the real meaning of becoming a Christian.

That Kierkegaard obtained a *rapport* with his readers (the learners) by means of *Either/Or* is a well known fact. The book was a sensation, and he was immediately recognized as the outstanding aesthetic author of Denmark. But hardly anyone paid attention to *Two Edifying Discourses* which followed three months afterwards. By *Either/Or* he had approached the people in a realm where he had arrested their enthusiasm and interest. He had stirred up the crowd in order to get hold of "the individual."

⁴⁴ *The Point of View*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29 ff.

3. The form of the communication must be artistic and provide for the self-activity of the pupil. The various unlike possibilities of life are to be forced upon the individual. The teacher himself is "without authority,"⁴⁶ it is the ideal which shall judge the learner, force him to pay attention and, if possible, bring him to a decision. The teacher must not attempt to force the learner to an opinion, to a conviction, or to faith. The task is to arrest his interest, to force him to take notice. Then, while the teacher holds the interest of the learner, he must lead him on as rapidly as possible into situations where the learner may recognize the ideal or the Christian categories as such. The teacher is to lead him to the crossroad of decision, but at this point he must rapidly step aside. The decision is to be executed in the isolation of the learner's own personality.

The word "self-activity" is almost a dogma of modern progressive education. However, when Kierkegaard uses the term, he does not refer to learning by doing in any outward sense, but to the inward activity of the personality.

While Kierkegaard discontinued the use of the indirect method of communication after the Easter experience of 1848, he did not discard the concept of indirect communication as an integral part of the Christian faith, for indirect communication is inherent in the Christian doctrine of incarnation. This doctrine Kierkegaard accepted in its Lutheran form.⁴⁷ Luther's explanation to the second article of the Apostle's Creed begins with the words, "I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten by the Father from eternity; and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary." In Jesus Christ the communicator himself is dialectically qualified, and all direct communication is impossible. To illustrate: When a person says, "I am God" or "I and the Father are one," that is direct communication, but when the one who speaks these words is an individual human being it is not quite so direct for it is not perfectly clear that one individual man could be God. The fact that the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 130, 147, 155, 159. ⁴⁷ *Training in Christianity*, p. 134.

speaker is involved changes it to indirect communication.⁴⁸ Instead of a direct communication with a corresponding direct reception, *there is a choice*: Will you believe him or not?⁴⁹ "Faith in a pregnant sense has to do with the God-man."⁵⁰ And, as Kierkegaard says, to do away with the God-man is to do away with Christianity.⁵¹

In the case of the indirect communication spoken of in the *Postscript* the teacher was to reduplicate the communication itself by means of a maieutic art, which brought forth poetic characters which existed in the various categories. The first principle of this communication was to maintain the essential distance between the personalities of the teacher and the pupil. The subjectivity of the teacher should remain concealed.⁵² While Kierkegaard recognized the value of the Socratic art when the problem was to remove the illusion of Christendom, that all are Christians, he realized that in Christianity there is a new emphasis upon the personality of the teacher. In the *Postscript*, indirect communication was by means of the "double reflection," the artful method; in Christianity the medium of indirect communication is reduplication or the transformation of life in accordance with the truth one objectively knows.⁵³ The reduplication of the teacher consists in that he exists in what he teaches.⁵⁴

Here we meet a *new educational principle*: The teacher must be what he teaches.⁵⁵ This is due to the fact that Christianity is not a doctrine but a communication of existence. It is not immaterial who presents Christianity, for it is not just the question of reciting the right thing. When Christianity is not reduplicated in the teacher, he does not teach Christianity for Christianity is existence communication and can only be communicated by existence, i.e., by one whose life is transformed by Christianity. This places a tremendous emphasis upon the character of the Christian teacher.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 140.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 140 ff.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 133 f. note.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ *Christian Discourses*, p. 349; *Papirer*, IX A 163, 207.

CHAPTER XIII

BASIC CONCEPTS IN KIERKEGAARD'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

My need of Christianity is so great (both on account of my sufferings and my sins and my terrible introversion): that is why I am not understood.¹

No student of Kierkegaard who is sympathetic to his great inward struggle to arrive at the Truth upon which he could live and die, who has a measure of appreciation for his tremendous dialectic powers and brilliant literary talents, could desire to furnish a critical estimate of his philosophy, for he finds himself standing under judgment. Hence it is not the purpose of the author to contribute a critique, but rather the more modest task of introducing the reader to the religious thought of Kierkegaard and to his numerous writings. This last chapter will be given to an overview of the basic concepts in Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion.

According to Kierkegaard the human self is a derived self, rooted in God and designed to live in harmony with God. The self finds its highest and most comprehensive unity in God.² This assumption he has in common with Hegel and German Idealism as a whole.

While pragmatism and intuitionism are essentially epistemologies, ways of knowing, with incidental metaphysical implications, idealism with its problem of Reality is primarily metaphysics.³ It is exactly at this point that Kierkegaard attacked the Hegelian philosophy.

Logic, according to Kierkegaard, does not and cannot

¹ *The Journals*, No. 1056. ² *Supra*, pp. 110-111.

³ W. E. Hocking, *Types of Philosophy*, p. 247.

define reality.⁴ Logic deals with *the possible* and does not come into contact with reality as an actuality. The entities of metaphysics and the forms of logic do not *exist* as such, and when they exist they exist as imbedded in the flesh and blood of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious.⁵ Positive objective knowledge—logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences which rest upon sense-perceptions—cannot furnish an adequate revelation of reality. They suffer from two fundamental defects of abstractions.⁶

1. Logic and mathematics are hypothetical in their application to reality: history and the natural sciences are endless approximations to the truth. Over against Hegel, Kierkegaard constantly repeats that historical knowledge at its best is nothing but an approximation process.⁷

2. All objective knowledge is indifferent to the existing knowing subject. It does not express the situation of the knowing subject in existence. It is not knowledge which relates itself to his existence.⁸

All objective knowledge of reality belongs to the realm of *possibility*. There is only one reality to which an existing person may sustain more than a cognitive relation, namely his own reality or the fact that he exists. To every other reality he stands in a cognitive relationship.⁹ Reality must therefore be sought in the sphere of the subjective attitude of the knower. Objectively the accent falls on "What"; subjectively the accent falls on "How." At its maximum this subjective "How" is the passion of the infinite and the passion of the infinite is the truth.¹⁰ "*An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth*, the highest truth attainable for an *existing* individual."¹¹ Already in his first literary work, *Either/Or*, truth was consigned to the realm of personality. The book ends with the words, "Only the truth which edifies is truth for you."¹² Subjectivity be-

⁴ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 9. ⁵ *Stages*, p. 430.

⁶ David F. Swenson, *Something About Kierkegaard*, pp. 142-143.

⁷ *Postscript*, pp. 75, 173. ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 75-173. ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 182. ¹² *Either/Or*, II, p. 294.

comes the test and the norm of truth but, mark well, in the Socratic sense of "Know thyself." This Socratic *dictum* Kierkegaard clothed in a more dynamic form, "Choose thyself,"¹³ for the real subject is not the contemplative and knowing subject since knowledge belongs to the sphere of the *possible*; the real subject is the ethically existing subject.¹⁴ "The only reality which exists for an existing individual is his own ethical reality."¹⁵ In an age when the philosophers were occupied with the problem of objective reality, whether idealistic or materialistic, Kierkegaard challenged philosophy to rethink the problem. While Hegel and his followers in Denmark encompassed all of world-history, society, and its institutions, Kierkegaard asked, What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to exist when one is not a philosopher?

By the thesis, "Truth is subjectivity,"¹⁶ Kierkegaard marked out the realm of his philosophical investigation. All his works are devoted to the charting of the subjective life of the human spirit in its evaluations and emotions, its anxieties and despairs, dreads, doubts, faith, hope, and love. In the philosophy of the stages as presented in the aesthetic literature of Kierkegaard we have a philosophy of values arranged on a scale from the lowest to the highest. These values are not presented in a formal or systematic manner, but in poetic creations, in characters who exist in the various modes within the aesthetic, ethical, or religious spheres of life. One may object that these characters are foreign to actual life, but this is to miss the point. It is the *idea which is clothed in flesh and blood*. Kierkegaard has only three stages, but these are defined in such a way that every mode of life will find its place in one of the three or in their combinations. Most men live on the aesthetic level. This does not mean that their lives do not possess elements of ethics or religion, but the aesthetic element is dominant in their personalities. An idealist philosopher might ask, "Is there really no intellectual stage?" The an-

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁴ *Postscript*, p. 281.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 169 ff.

swer is no. The aestheticist A in the first part of *Either/Or* is by far the intellectual superior of Judge William, but the Judge has a deeper ethical insight, and his life is lived in ethical categories. An "intellectual stage" in contemplation of world-history or metaphysics, and for the building of philosophic systems would definitely belong within the aesthetic sphere of life. Kierkegaard complains that in relation to their systems the philosophers live in a shack near by. They do not live in their magnificent systematic buildings. Spiritually speaking a man's thought must be the building in which he lives.¹⁷ This is what he calls reduplication.

In Kierkegaard's presentation there is a definite and sharp breach in the continuity of the three stages. No man can live in two spheres at the same time. If a person's life is transported from the aesthetic sphere to the ethical sphere the aesthetic part of his nature is not destroyed but dethroned, i.e., it is under ethical domination. The transition from one stage to the other is always in terms of crises.

According to Höffding,¹⁸ Kierkegaard fails to furnish a motivation for the transition from one stage to another. It is true that he does not furnish any motivations for the transition in such a manner that an individual might imperceptibly emerge from one stage into another. A motivation of this nature would entirely cancel his conception of the ethical and religious stages with their decisions and relegate all of life to the aesthetic stage. Kierkegaard wanted to assert the importance of a real transition in contrast to a transition in thought where the philosopher might weigh and evaluate the various possibilities and in the end lose himself in aesthetic absent-mindedness and forget to inquire with respect to his own relation to such possibilities. Kierkegaard wanted to give the definite impression that the transitions from one stage to another

¹⁷ *The Journals*, No. 583.

¹⁸ Harald Höffding, *Søren Kierkegaard som Filosof* (Copenhagen: P. G. Philipsens Forlag, 1892), pp. 121 f.

were not necessary but contingent. If they presented themselves as possible, they also presented themselves as possible of nonrealization.¹⁹ From another point of view Kierkegaard's whole literary production is a motivation for choice. Thus *Either/Or* closes without result. The existences of the different characters are presented and the reader is left to judge for himself. Everywhere the motivation is maieutic so as to stir the reader to self-activity.

The norm of the stages is the relative intensity and tension in inwardness. Christianity with its consciousness of sin and the Paradox presents the highest possible tension and the deepest passion. In addition there is possibly another norm of objective nature, namely divine revelation, a norm which applies to the Christian mode of life: "For truth, from the Christian point of view, does not lie in the subject but in a revelation which must be proclaimed."²⁰ There is here a definite deviation from the dictum "Truth is subjectivity," but then again the appropriation of this truth is in the realm of the subjective.

According to Kierkegaard the experience of a consciousness of sin belongs to the Christian sphere of life. He also regards Christianity as a religion for maturity rather than for childhood. The Christian experience is too violent and severe to fit the life of a child. In this way one does not experience the forgiveness of sin before one has reached adult life. To the author it seems more reasonable to hold that the consciousness of sin and its Christian counterpart, the experience of release and forgiveness of sin, develop and deepen as the person grows religiously. However, we must recognize that Kierkegaard used the term sin-consciousness in a unique sense. He differentiated between the *consciousness of guilt* which belonged essentially to Religion A or the human religiosity, and the *consciousness of sin* which belonged exclusively to the Christian religiosity.²¹ Kierkegaard has not excluded the possibility of a

¹⁹ David F. Swenson, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁰ *The Journals*, No. 809.

²¹ For the distinction between "consciousness of guilt" and "consciousness of sin" see *supra*, pp. 95 f.

guilt feeling and the experience of forgiveness from religious life prior to the Christian life, but such experiences would not have the severeness and decisiveness of the Christian experience. Much of what we today regard as a consciousness of sin Kierkegaard would relegate to the ethical stage or to the realm of the human religiosity.

It seems to the author that though Kierkegaard's stages may have no actual counterpart in life, they have nevertheless an educational value. The entire literary presentation of the stages is calculated to stimulate self-activity and to motivate personal decisions by which the individual can transport himself from a lower to a higher sphere of life.

There are principally three factors that have contributed toward Kierkegaard's choice of the pseudonymous and highly artistic presentation which we find in the aesthetic works:

1. In Kierkegaard we meet a personality in which dialectic powers and philosophical thinking are fused with a creative imagination and literary ability of the highest order. The peculiar method of presentation he chose furnished a creative opportunity for his literary genius and aesthetic talents.

2. Another factor was his adoption of the method of indirect communication of the truth. When the truth is of a personal and subjective nature it cannot, according to Kierkegaard, be communicated as an objective result, but only by means of a maieutic art.

3. That the inherited melancholy with its reserve and self-isolation was a psychological factor behind the pseudonymous writings and the whole aesthetic production is something which he himself has intimated in *The Journals*.²²

As a result of the combination of magnificent literary skill and dialectic power we have from his pen a philosophical production comparable only to that of Plato in its nature, but with the distinction that Plato was a specula-

²² *The Journals*, Nos. 936, 939, also 748, 749, 754, 807, 937.

tive philosopher while Kierkegaard was an existential thinker.

If we ask the question, "What constitutes an ethical act?" we might find philosophical thinkers divided. There are some who would emphasize the ethical goals or the objective aspect as the essential qualification of the ethical, and in an ordered society such goals are of great importance. On the other hand there are thinkers who, like Kierkegaard, would emphasize the moral quality of the inward motive as the essential determinant of the ethical. To Hegel the history of civilization is the unfolding and the expression of immanent thought. The individual is immersed in this living process of the world and finds his freedom and his worth through a participation in the universal process as it is expressed in society and its institutions. From this it follows that the highest ethical law is: "Identify thyself with objective Reason as found in the institutions of mankind."²³ Hegel's ethics is expressed in his *Philosophy of Right*. He has no other ethics. To Kierkegaard this meant that Hegel's "system" has no ethics, for while it regards history as a process, history is not understood from the point of view of becoming, but from the point of view of finality.²⁴ History gives us an understanding of that which is past and finished but, for an existing individual, life is a matter of becoming, an unfinished business. Hegel's dialectic effected a synthesis of opposites in a higher unity, a unity which was to preserve the essence of both opposites while it annihilated them as separate entities. Hence the Hegelian watch-word "both/and." To Kierkegaard this meant the destruction of all ethics. Good and evil were for him absolute disjunctions which could not be mediated. "Either/or" became the key to heaven, "both/and" the key to hell. Hence the title of Kierkegaard's first work, *Either/Or*.

²³ W. E. Hocking, *Types of Philosophy*, revised edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 357.

²⁴ Postscript, p. 272 note.

In the philosophy of the stages there is no *pure* ethical stage. The ethical has a religious element as its universal background. While the ethicist has as his task to realize the universal, the whole emphasis is nevertheless upon the subjective, or existence in inwardness. The ethical ideality is found in choice, but it is the act of *choosing* and not the object of choice which is emphasized. The choosing is neither arbitrary nor necessary; it is qualified by freedom. It is not something outward, something which the individual has learned; it is immanent in personality, and consequently it cannot be communicated from one person to another. The ethical is everywhere and at all times concerned with *individuals* and with each and every one of them by himself.²⁵ Over against Hegel's social ethics, Kierkegaard emphasized the individual and the motive that characterizes the choice. "The ethical is . . . a correlative to individuality, and that to such a degree that each individual apprehends the ethical essentially only in himself, because the ethical is his complicity with [consciousness with] God."²⁶ By this last clause Kierkegaard has saved himself from an absolute solipsism. He presents no objective ethical values, the only value being the inwardness of the existing individual as he faces crises and makes his choices.

It has already been stated that objective standards for ethics or objective values have their significance in a society, but social objectives may also be reached by persons who have unethical motives. By the category "the individual" Kierkegaard has marked out the essential sphere of the ethical, namely the relationship of the individual to his own ideal in terms of striving and reduplication of that ideal in the actual life of the personality. There is nothing ethical in a mere acknowledgment of ethical value, and if the ethical is not realized in the life of the individual, the possession of a system of social ethics is an insignificant treasure.

In his ethics Kierkegaard is consistent with his meta-

²⁵ *Supra*, pp. 117-120.

²⁶ *Postscript*, p. 138.

physical view of reality as subjective. He emphasized that whatever ethical significance his authorship had was connected with the category of "the individual."²⁷

In Kierkegaard's presentation of religiosity we find the same subjective approach which characterized his metaphysics and ethics. His realm of investigation is religiosity rather than doctrine, appropriation rather than indoctrination. The emphasis is upon faith rather than upon the object of faith. Such concepts as the virgin birth, the Trinity, the sacraments, and the miracles never caused him any anxiety. Religiosity and inwardness are not subject to objective scientific research. The scientific method is not the norm of Christianity.

In *Fear and Trembling* there was in Abraham's experience a conflict between the ethical demand, "thou shalt not kill," and his religious obligation, that of sacrificing Isaac. By his relation to God Abraham has an absolute obligation, and this results in his case in a teleological suspension of the ethical. The difference between the ethical and the religious individual consists in that the ethical individual is only concerned with himself and his own reality while the religious individual is infinitely concerned with a reality other than his own.

Kierkegaard has drawn a sharp distinction between two types of religiosity and uses Socrates as the representative for the human religiosity or religion A, and Jesus, the God in Time, as the representative for the Christian religiosity or religion B.

The human religiosity is the religiosity of immanence. It is based on the supposition that human nature is essentially sound and that the Eternal is the background of man's life and existence. The task of this religiosity is to maintain an absolute relation to the Absolute and a relative relation to relative ends. When suffering is regarded as the essential expression of the God-relationship, it is due to the contradiction which arises when the consciousness of

²⁷ *The Point of View*, p. 131.

the Absolute and the relation to the Eternal is to be held fast in an infinite passion by an individual whose life is rooted in the finite and temporal.

The deeper the individual whose religiosity is human enters into the God-relation, the more conscious he becomes of the fact that he is bound in the finite. His experience is paradoxical for the closer he gets to the Absolute the more he realizes how distant he is from it. Progress is here tantamount to retrogression. He is unequal to the task and the result is guilt-consciousness. This form of religiosity moves entirely within the realm of immanence; there is therefore in this religiosity no breach with nature.

The Christian religiosity or the paradoxical religiosity is altogether transcendental. It is based on the supposition that human nature is "the untruth," and that personality as such has become invalidated. There is thus a definite breach between the Eternal and the human nature. This religiosity is characterized by the fact that the Divine has appeared in time and in historic form of *one single individual* in the personality of Jesus.

It is at this point Kierkegaard differs radically from Hegel. The conviction that the human spirit is God is expressed by Jesus in the words, "I and the Father are One." According to Hegel this is the unalterable truth which it is man's task to appropriate. However, the words of Christ suffer from the defect that they are applied to the one person Jesus Christ alone. It is here Hegel comes to the aid of Christianity and gives it an "adequate form" so that it can be defended against all enemies: That which is said about the single individual Jesus Christ is equally valid when applied to every other individual. Humanity is God, and world-history has convinced Hegel that this is so.²⁸ If, on the contrary, such words as "I and the Father are One" and "I am the Truth" are applicable only to *the one single person Jesus*, they express the fact that human immanence is abandoned by the Eternal and that one can

²⁸ The above discussion is based on E. Geismar's epitome of Hegel, *Søren Kierkegaard*, III, pp. 8 ff.

only relate oneself to the Truth through a relation to Jesus Christ or "God in time." The difference between Hegel and Kierkegaard lies in the fact that Hegel does not recognize the absolute difference between God and man.

In the *Christian religiosity* the consciousness of guilt is heightened to sin-consciousness through the discovery that there has been an alteration of human nature itself so that the truth is no longer found within but outside the personality. Sin-consciousness is the only means of entrance to Christianity. In the Paradox as the object of faith and in the consciousness of sin religious suffering has reached its greatest inwardness.

In the author's estimate it is Kierkegaard's contribution to have drawn a distinct line between all human religiosity of immanence and the Christian religiosity of transcendence. The human individual does not possess the Truth nor the power to *understand* it. If he is to possess the Truth, God himself must reveal it to him. There is in Kierkegaard's philosophy an absolute dualism or *discontinuity* between God and human nature. This dualism is due to the fact that man is regarded as a created and derived self, but more essentially it is due to sin which is held to be a qualitative difference between God and man.

According to Hegel the outer is the inner, and the inner is the outer.²⁹ The opening words of the Preface to *Either/Or* was Kierkegaard's first public attack upon the application of this principle to the individual personality.

"I wonder if you may not sometimes have felt inclined to doubt a little the correctness of the familiar philosophical maxim that the external is the internal and the internal the external. Perhaps you have cherished in your heart a secret which you felt in all its joy or pain, was too precious for you to share with another. Perhaps your life has brought you in contact with some person of whom you suspected something of the kind was true, although you

²⁹ Hegel's *Science of Logic* translated by W. H. Johnston and L. G. Struthers (two volumes, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), II, pp. 154-159.

were never able to wrest his secret from him either by force or cunning. . . . For my part I have always been heretically minded on this point in philosophy.”³⁰

There is an inwardness, faith, which is incommensurable with every outward expression. Thus Abraham, the hero of faith, could not make himself immediately understood.³¹

Faith does not come as the result of a scientific inquiry,³² it is not a hypothesis or a probability. Faith like reality and morality belongs essentially to the realm of the subjective. “Faith is the highest passion in the sphere of human subjectivity.”³³ Such a definition of faith is altogether consistent with Kierkegaard’s concept of revelation and the Paradox. If the Christian revelation is a Paradox, if the Paradox is the absurd in that the personality of Jesus is paradoxical in itself, and if an eternal happiness and a relation to the Eternal is entirely dependent upon a relation which cannot be comprehended by the understanding, then faith can only be defined as a risk and as an objective uncertainty held fast in the most passionate inwardness.³⁴

To Kierkegaard it is ridiculous to bring God to light objectively, for God is subject and exists only for subjectivity.³⁵ Such a view is in accord with the metaphysical concept of the human self as the only existing reality for an existing person, and also in accord with the concept of the ethical as inwardness and as the individual’s consciousness with God. Within the idealistic human religiosity which regards human nature as essentially sound, this would be a consistent assumption. But the difficulty appears when we proceed to the Christian religiosity. Here the truth lies outside the individual. Kierkegaard emphatically affirms that Christianity is not a doctrine, nor a teacher with a doctrine. “The object of faith is the reality of the teacher.”³⁶ Nevertheless, there is a definite doctrinal content to his concept of the Christian religiosity. This

³⁰ *Either/Or*, I, p. 3.

³¹ *Supra*, pp. 62-63.

³² *Postscript*, p. 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 208.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 178 f.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

cannot be avoided if the historical fact, "God in time" (which in Kierkegaard's conception according to its very nature is unhistorical), is to be transmitted from a contemporary to a later generation. His idea of the God-man is in full harmony with the Athanasian dogma of the two distinct natures in the personality of Jesus Christ, and with the Lutheran confessions. The object of faith is the person of this dogma, but the relation to the dogma is not in an intellectual understanding or appropriation, but in faith in the absurd. Kierkegaard's thoughts on the atonement and Christ's substitutionary death also reflect conservative Lutheran theology.⁸⁷

It seems to the author that whenever an individual seeks to base his eternal happiness upon the Biblical records, he is confronted with the problem of the authenticity and veracity of the Christian revelation and of the Scriptures which present this revelation. Kierkegaard repeatedly affirms that all historical knowledge is approximate knowledge and therefore incommensurable with an infinite passion for an eternal happiness. If this principle is maintained all historical research and textual criticism of the Biblical sources can offer no help in establishing a foundation for an eternal happiness, for all such efforts end only in an approximation to the truth. If we fall back upon the authority of the church, as does Catholicism, the dialectician needs merely to ask, What is authority? and, Why do you accept this particular authority? The only possible alternate seems to be that the divine revelation verifies itself to the subjective nature of the individual through faith which is regarded as a divine gift. Thus Kierkegaard says⁸⁸ that just as a hungry animal understands the difference between a stone and a piece of bread, so the anxious conscience understands the atonement. How can a man who speculates about the atonement indifferently and objectively understand it? The atonement manifests itself only to the anxious conscience. And again, "As little as God lets a species of fish remain in a particular sea unless the plant

⁸⁷ *Christian Discourses*, pp. 368-369.

⁸⁸ *Papirer*, VII A 192.

also grows there which is its nutriment, just so little shall God leave in ignorance of what he must believe the man who was truly concerned.”³⁹ That an acceptance of the revelation embodied in the Scriptures is not without risk is plainly stated in the *Journal* entry, “The Dialectic of Becoming a Christian”:

“There is first of all doubt as to whether one can base an eternal happiness upon something historical. Take the historical record of the life of Jesus, and the question arises as to the reliability of the historical report. Though it be the most reliable of historical facts this would be of no help since a historical fact is too uncertain a basis for an eternal happiness.

“In becoming a Christian a man says to himself: Here is a historical fact which teaches me that in order to obtain an eternal happiness I must have recourse to Jesus Christ. Now he must be careful and avoid turning to scientific methods of research, for if the historical fact was ten times as well established, it would not help to establish a better condition for an eternal happiness. What then does he do? He says to himself: I choose! That historical fact means so much to me that I risk my whole life upon it. Then he lives entirely full of the idea. He did not begin with the proof, he began to live on the idea. To live in such a manner is to risk everything, but without risk there is no faith. The Christian stakes all upon an ‘If.’ ”⁴⁰

It is evident that such a subjective view is not objectively valid. However, if one is not to lose oneself in an approximation process, there are only two alternatives, to reject every historical record as incommensurable with an infinite passion for an eternal happiness, or to accept the record as something which validates itself to faith. He who chooses the last alternative can only maintain his position by an appeal to his own experience. His experience, like that of the mystic, is ineffable.

In Kierkegaard’s conception, Christianity is inimical to

³⁹ *Christian Discourses*, p. 248.

⁴⁰ Paraphrased from *The Journals*, Nos. 1044-1046.

human nature and to life itself. Suffering is regarded as the essential expression for all real religiosity.⁴¹ The suffering is due to the paradoxical nature of the object of faith, to one's own consciousness of sin, and to the conflict between the Christian life and the world. The Christian life is a dying away from the world.⁴² While Christian life expresses itself in faith, hope, and love, a transcendental meaning is given to these words.⁴³ Faith is not a natural endowment or inborn spontaneity, but against the understanding. Hope is hope against hope or hope when every *human* hope has been eliminated; and love is the love which is misunderstood in the world. The whole of Christian life is interpreted with the cross as its background. The cross was man's reply to God's love as expressed in Christ, and whenever life is lived with Christ as its intermediary qualification it will be in conflict with the world. This concept of Christianity is due to the nature of the concept of revelation. The purpose of the Christian revelation is not to develop and ennoble human nature. It is not "to raise reality up into ideality," but to "bring ideality into reality."⁴⁴ The Christian revelation brings an altogether new factor into human nature which is as inimical to human nature as the absolute is to the relative. Christianity is an infringement or attack upon human nature. It is accusation upon accusation.

There is only one objective in Kierkegaard's philosophy of religion, and it is expressed in the words of Johannes Climacus. "I assume that there awaits me a highest good, an eternal happiness.... I have heard that Christianity proposes itself as a condition for the acquirement of this good. Now I ask how I am to become a Christian."⁴⁵ The pathos behind these words overpowered Kierkegaard's whole life. It was the burden of his whole work as an au-

⁴¹ *Postscript*, pp. 386-468.

⁴² *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, pp. 97-99. *Supra*, pp. 90-91, 170-171 on the idea of "dying away" from the world.

⁴³ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, pp. 100 f.

⁴⁴ *The Concept of Dread*, p. 15. ⁴⁵ *Postscript*, pp. 19, 20, 545.

thor. He who is not vitally interested at this point can never fully understand Kierkegaard.

In all his works religiosity is expressed in terms of striving. Like Luther he held that faith is restless and perturbing.⁴⁶ Christianity is not a comfort or an escape mechanism. It means to follow and imitate the Pattern, to accept the judgment of God upon one's life, and to seek the forgiveness of sin as one who is altogether unworthy of receiving it. "The infinite humiliation and grace, then a striving grounded in gratitude, this is Christianity."⁴⁷ Kierkegaard had no sympathy with religious speculation or passive contemplation. The principle which determined his ethical and religious philosophy is expressed in the words: "In relation to an eternal happiness as the absolute good, pathos is not a matter of words, but of permitting this conception to transform the entire existence of the individual."⁴⁸ There is no religiosity and no ethical life apart from this principle; it is fundamental in all that Kierkegaard has written.

⁴⁶ *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourselves*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ *Papirer*, X 3 A 734. ⁴⁸ *Postscript*, p. 347.

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